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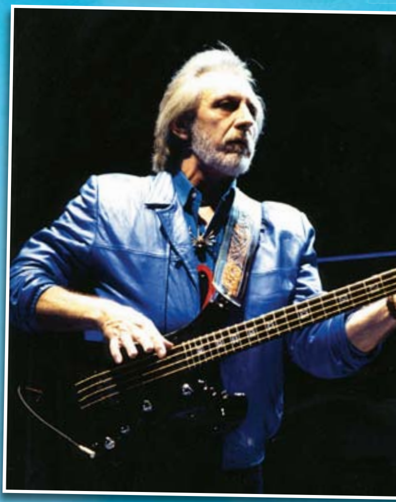

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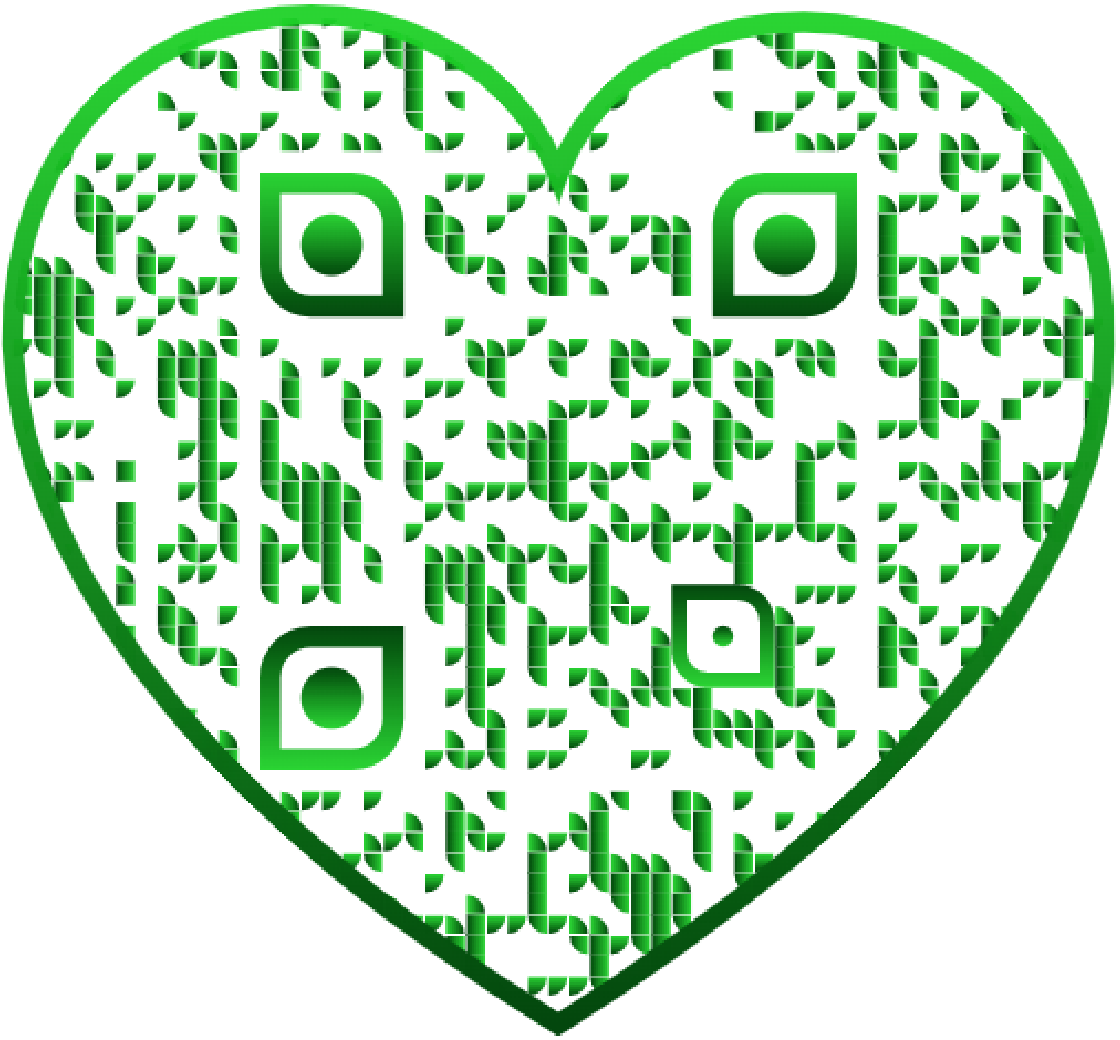

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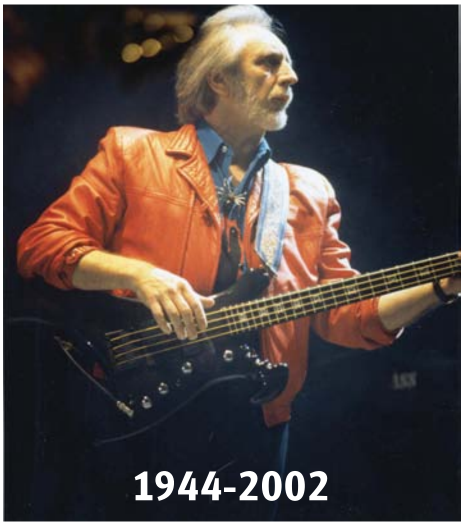

1944-2002

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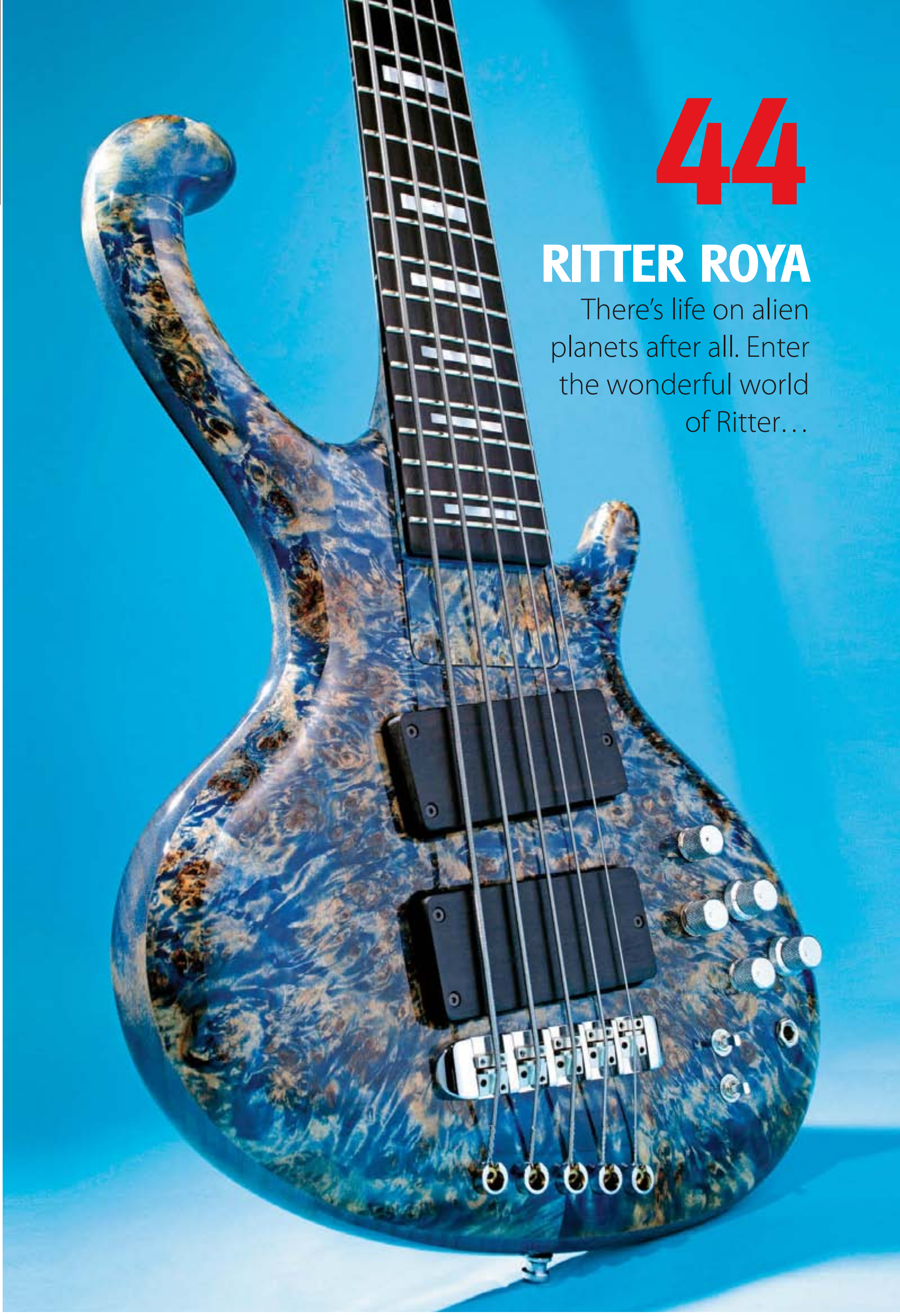
In the 10 years since the great Who bassist's death, his legacy has only increased. We reveal the man behind the myth and take a close look at the bass technique that made him a legend in his own lifetime.



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Grace Note

Of all places, I was on holiday in Guernsey – not exactly a rock'n'roll location, you'll agree – when Blaze Publishing's head honcho Wes Stanton called and asked me if I'd like to be the new editor of ***Bass Guitar Magazine.*** "Are you kidding? Hell yes!" I yelled at him, over the sound of seagulls and kids fighting over ice-cream…

As veteran readers may know, I've been contributing to these hallowed pages since the dawn of time – well, 2003 – and I've enjoyed watching BGM progress to the point it occupies today as the UK's only print publication devoted wholly to the low end. The magazine's previous editor, Ben Cooper, did a tremendous job in his tenure as the big cheese of bass, and I have big boots to fill. I'm fully committed to continuing the mission established by Ben and his predecessors, which is to ensure that the bass-playing community is supplied with the best possible artist interviews, gear reviews and technique columns, regardless of ability or budget. We're also focused strongly on delivering a great magazine in app form, which together with our website www.bassguitarmagazine.com will keep you informed of life on Planet Bass when you just can't get to a newsagent.

In this issue we're celebrating the life and phenomenal work of the late John Entwistle, whose death 10 years ago this month deprived us of arguably the world's most accomplished bassist. The renowned journalist Chris Charlesworth, who knew John well, is on hand to reveal what the Ox was really like, while none other than Ben Cooper digs into his bass technique (hey, I thought we'd got rid of that guy?). Elsewhere, we bring you interviews with bassists of every genre from jazz to punk-rock and beyond, plus reviews of basses that will cost you anywhere from a few hundred quid to the price of a new Aga.

Got a suggestion, an idea, or just a rant? Email me at joel@blazepublishing.co.uk: I can take it...

Joel McIver, editor

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SUBSCRIPTION RATE UK £63.00
For all subscription offers and overseas prices visit www.bassguitarmagazine.co.uk or telephone the subscriptions hotline on 01926 339808

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DISTRIBUTION
Distributed to the news trade by Comag Magazine Marketing, West Drayton, Middlesex, UB7 7QE

PUBLISHED BY
Blaze Publishing Ltd. Lawrence House, Morrell Street, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, CV32 5SZ

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LowDown

All the news that's fit to print from **Planet Bass**

David Ellefson Rocks Your Phone

Mobile apps are everywhere these days, and now there's one tailor-made for bass players. David Ellefson, who plucks the low strings in Megadeth and who appeared on our cover way, way back in April, has lent his name to this frankly splendid effects unit, accessible by plugging your bass into an iPhone or iPad via a nifty iRiffPort device which costs around $99 (see our review of both connector and app elsewhere in this issue). The app, which allows the bassist various effects and amp options, also enables you to replicate Ellefson's distinctive scooped sound. It's that rare thing: the killer app, as tech-loving people have it.

Ellefson and Pocketlabworks, who manufacture the iRiffPort and developed the app, have been kind enough to give us one of each to the lucky reader who emails us the correct answer to this laughably easy question.

David Ellefson is known for a famous bass intro. On which Megadeth song would you hear it?

A Death Comes… But Who's Crying?
B Peace Sells… But Who's Buying?
C Dawn Breaks… But Who's Snoring?

Answers to joel@blazepublishing.co.uk by 20 June.

Revolverrrrr

Every month we reveal the bass-line we can't stop listening to

This Month: 'That's The Way Love Is'
Bassist: James Jamerson
Album: by Marvin Gaye

This slow, soulful take on an Isley Brothers tune illustrates perfectly the genius of James Jamerson. Somehow he manages to create a bass-line that works with the drums to support the song, allowing Marvin Gaye's always-astonishing voice to soar above the music, and still weaves counter-melodies underneath that are every bit the equal of the vocals. All the Jamerson trademarks are here: bouncing rhythms, chromatic passing tones and walking lines, and melody by the bucketful. There's no point picking a best Jamerson line, because they were all so great – but this is at the top of our list anyway.

F Bass appoint Bass Gear Ltd

Roll up! Get your lovely (and we do mean very lovely) F Basses from specialist bass guitar dealer Bass Gear Ltd, based in leafy Twyford in Berkshire, who have been appointed exclusive UK dealer for the world renowned bass builder. "We are very impressed with the F Bass instruments that are designed and made so well, but what helps enormously in retailing boutique bass guitars is also having a well-organised maker that can be depended on. The team have got hand-building and supplying off to a fine art over the 34 years F Bass have been operating," said Phil Nixon, Bass Gear's managing director. F Bass founder George Furlanetto said of Bass Gear's appointment, "We have a loyal customer base in the UK, and Bass Gear Ltd have been appointed because not only do they really care about high-end basses, they engage with the bass playing community over there so well". A range of four-, five- and six-string F Basses are now available to try at Bass Gear's showroom: tell them we sent you and that we want one to hang over the mantelpiece at the *BGM* command bunker.

Info: www.bassgear.co.uk, www.fbass.com

Paying Tribute To Jim Marshall

The late Jim Marshall, who died at the age of 88 in April, was responsible for the legendary amplifiers that bear his name and enabled in doing so the rise to glory of too many musicians to name. Hearing of Jim's passing, Sir Paul McCartney said "Jim made it loud!" and Motley Crue bassist Nikki Sixx added "RIP Jim: you were responsible for some of the greatest audio moments in music's history, and 50% responsible for all our hearing loss." In tribute to the great man and his work, a host of rock musicians are gathering at London's Wembley Arena on Saturday 22 September to mark the 50th anniversary of the Marshall company. Bassists such as Glenn Hughes – who said of Jim, "A brilliant man and a dear friend: rock musos worldwide will miss him" – will be appearing at the show, as well as musicians from bands as diverse as Iron Maiden, Slipknot, Whitesnake, Chickenfoot, The Cult, Black Label Society, Judas Priest and Black Sabbath. **www.livenation.co.uk, www.marshallamps.com**

All That Jazz...

The UK's longest running jazz summer school is embarking on a new chapter. It is now re-branded as The Original UK Jazz Summer School and runs from Sunday 29 July to Friday 3 August at The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama in Cardiff, a beautiful state of the art facility that has recently benefited from a £22.5m investment.

It can directly trace its roots back to the first jazz summer course launched as part of the Barry Summer School in 1966, and includes stints at The University of Glamorgan and recently Trinity College of Music in Greenwich.

The residential week-long programme offers a very full timetable, most of which is optional, so participants are able to customise their week to be as intense or relaxing as they wish. It is open to instrumentalists of all ages and levels of experience and includes live concerts every night performed by students and tutors. The bass tutors are Steve Watts and Alison Rayner, both highly experienced and renowned in the jazz world.

Full details including virtual tours, application forms and online payments are available at **www.theoriginalukjazzsummerschool.com.**

The Great White North calls

If you're heading past the North Pole in June and early July, you could do worse than drop into Montreal in Canada, where bassists such as *BGM* alumni Stanley Clarke, Marcus Miller, Victor Wooten and Esperanza Spalding and other greats such as Ron Carter and Meshell Ndegeocello will be funking it up alongside a stellar cast of musical talent. The 33rd edition of the Festival International de Jazz de Montréal runs from June 28 to July 7. Other, non-bass-playing but still righteously amazing musicians such as Wayne Shorter, Seal, Norah Jones, Get The Blessing, Ziggy Marley and James Taylor will be there too – and we're delighted to confirm that our very own Andy Hughes will be on site too. If you see him, buy that man a beer. **www.montrealjazzfest.com**

TRIUMVIRATE

Each month we select three essential albums from a genre or artist. This month...

DISCO

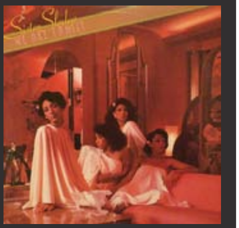
1 Chic, Why You Need It...

This multi-platinum album should be in every bass player's collection, if only for the delicious bass playing on the band's trademark tune 'Le Freak'. The late, great Bernard Edwards lays down a wonderfully funky verse riff that bubbles along under Nile Rogers glass-like guitar parts. He illustrates perfect control in the chorus, punctuating the kick drum, where lesser players might throw in unnecessary fills, afraid of the silence. And who can forget that iconic bass break? Elsewhere check out '(Funny) Bone', 'I Want Your Love' and 'Chic Cheer' for some high-quality disco bass-lines.

2 KC & The Sunshine Band, KC & The Sunshine Band Why You Need It...

For a musical genre so widely pilloried for being vacuous fluff, it's incredible just how many disco classics have endured. This 1975 release from KC & The Sunshine band features two such tracks: 'Get Down Tonight' and 'That's The Way (I Like It)'. Every track on the album is ably underpinned by Richard Finch's tight groove-centric playing, which always supports the songs.

3 Sister Sledge, We Are Family Why You Need It...



It's Mr. Edwards again, on top form throughout this 1979 effort. Although the four sisters Sledge were the visual focus of the band, and excellent singers, it was the songwriting genius of Rogers and Edwards that created one of the genre's most beloved albums. The title track's staccato finger funk, tight octave lines and throaty slap breaks must make it one of the greatest bass songs of all time. The album's other big hit, 'He's The Greatest Dancer' features more of that classic punchy Edwards bass work, and as it's coupled with that wiry guitar riff, it's no wonder the track has been sampled and re-recorded by a variety of artists.

Rockschool Launches Version 4 Bass Syllabus, featuring Henry Thomas and Dave Marks

Rockschool, the musical education institution, has over 500 exam centres and more than 4500 instrumental teachers registered in the UK alone, so there's no excuse not to hone your bass theory and chops, especially as they've just announced Version 4 of their Bass Syllabus with the assistance of renowned session bassist Henry Thomas (Van Morrison, Paul Weller, Cliff Richard, George Michael, Evita, Les Miserables) and BGM's very own Dave Marks, who has held down bass notes with Gareth Gates, Paul Carrick, the Carl Palmer Band and the Thriller Live show ('Shamone!'). Rockschool tell us: "Building on the global success of its current exams, Rockschool talked to students and teachers, listened to what they had to say and used their comments as a guide to develop the all-new fourth Syllabus. The new material for the exams features one of the worlds most respected session bass players, Henry Thomas and the highly versatile Dave Marks. The format of the new curriculum will be very familiar to students with a number of

new features and refinements that will enhance the total learning experience. Rockschool has recognised that performers often want to concentrate on a particular musical genre and the new Syllabus has been built to allow a high degree of flexibility in musical choice. All the supporting tests and exercises will support your musical skills enabling you to approach the performance pieces with confidence as well as providing many of the tools needed for improvisation. Rockschool can also announce they will be making the arrangements of the Debut, 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 grades available digitally in due course."

Info: www.rockschool.co.uk/2012syllabus or contact qualifications@rockschool.co.uk.

WHY WE LOVE...

MARK KING

Standout Tracks: 'Running In The Family', 'Lessons In Love', 'Sun Goes Down'

Recommended Albums: Bassists are supposed to be the bedrock of the band. The quiet man (or lady) standing off to one side, keeping it all together and making the guitarist sound good. Occasionally we might step up for some backing vocals, and heck some of us have the audacity to be the lead vocalist, but Mark King took it to a whole new level (the number of which escapes us for the minute...). King's origins as a drummer are easy to spot in his wildly rhythmic slap playing, and he became a regular guest on TV shows in the 80s and 90s performing stunning explosions of machine-gun slap. It's often easy to forget, though, that he's so much more than the millions of clones who followed in his wake. Unlike the majority of the slap-happy, Youtube-bedroom-video brigade, King is able to weave his slap licks seamlessly in and out of Level 42's arrangements,

making the style integral to the song as opposed to mere 'icing' (see 'Running In The Family' and 'Lessons In Love'). A wonderfully smooth fingerstyle player too, he's as at ease laying down bubbling sixteenth-note finger funk ('Sun Goes Down'), or supportive melodic lines as in the jazzy ballad 'Romance'. And all while belting out the vocals. A true legend.

ROAD WARRIOR

The Pro's On The Road Survival Kit
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www.themurderbarn.com

1 Marshall Bluesbreaker pedal – Used in conjunction with a Line Selector, so I can keep a dry signal mixed in, I find that guitar overdrive pedals offer a much better bite and presence when you want to get down and dirty than most purpose-built bass overdrives. In a six-piece band, fuzz bass can get lost really easily, but this pedal means I can cut through without that fizzy harsh top end.

2 A notebook – You never know when inspiration will strike and a good idea will surface. I think that you can't beat the good old pen and paper for getting ideas down quickly. Often I can't understand what I've written, but trying to decipher what you wrote at 3am three weeks ago is half the fun.

3 A map – We live in the age of GPS, but if technology fails you need to have a backup. We've all been there, in the middle of nowhere, when the GPS says you're in a river or something. If you've got a driver, then make sure they've got a map too.

4 A smartphone – A great way to get through the more boring parts of touring. It's an entertainment machine, with music, films and even apps that allow you to record basic song ideas. But more than that, it covers all the bases for keeping in touch with home, either by phone or online. And it fits in your pocket.

PAWN SHOP SERIES FENDER REVERSE JAG HITS THE UK

The mighty Fender have added the first ever bass to its Pawn Shop range, the Reverse Jaguar. A tasty-looking bass by anyone's standards, the instrument is said to have been intended to "offer bold personality, striking looks and daring tones". It features a reverse body and reverse headstocks (hence its name), a new pickguard shape, two Reverse Jaguar humbucking pickups and a streamlined control layout with a single three-way pickup toggle switch and two knobs for volume and tone. Look out for a review soon.
www.fender.com

Bass in the USA

Jon D'Auria reports from across the pond.

Summer is in full swing here in the States, which means plenty of new album releases powered by low-end, bass-heavy festivals and probably a few more shirtless, sweaty moshers than we're typically comfortable with. Get your festival tickets, put your new summer anthem on repeat and keep your bass strapped on, as this summer is sure to be a great one.

Honouring both the 20th anniversary of Metallica, also known as the 'Black Album', and their late bassist Cliff Burton, Metallica are holding the first ever Orion Music & More festival on 23 and 24 June. The festival, which will take place at Bader Field in Atlantic City, New Jersey, is named after Burton's instrumental composition 'Orion', featured on the group's career-best Master Of Puppets album in 1986. Metallica, with their current bassist Robert Trujillo, will headline both nights of the festival and will play the 'Black Album' and their 1984 album Ride The Lightning in their entirety. In a recent chat at the NAMM show, Trujillo told us that the band are truly excitement about the upcoming shows. "We're just excited to get out there and play for our fans, who always support us through everything we do," said Trujillo. "There's nothing really like playing at a summer festival, and the fact that we'll be joined by other bands that are so great really puts the exclamation point on it for us. It's going to be big." Joining the kings of metal will be supporting acts Arctic Monkeys, Avenged Sevenfold, Modest Mouse, Daniel Tichenor, Cage The Elephant and many others. Tickets are on sale now at www.orionmusicandmore.com.

If you find yourself in the desolate, sun-soaked county of Manchester, Tennessee this month, don't worry. Either you're very lost – in which case you probably should worry – or you're about to attend one of the most epic music festivals of the summer, with some of the best bass talent in the world. If it's the latter, then welcome to the tenth annual Bonnaroo Music Festival. This year is even larger than the 2011 event, with enough low-end ploughing through those country hills to start a cattle stampede. This year's headliners are bassist Colin Greenwood with his festival hopping-band Radiohead, the always flamboyant Flea and his Red Hot Chili Peppers and five-string lover and long-jam enthusiast Mike Gordon and Phish. Other bands include the Beach Boys, Puscifer, Bon Iver, Foster The People, The Roots, Flying Lotus, Fitz & The Tantrums and too many other bands to name. Seriously, go to the website and see how long it takes you. The festival will take place from 7 to 10 June and tickets can be purchased at www.bonnaroo.com.

Geddy Lee and his legendary band Rush are preparing to release their twentieth album (yep, you read that correctly) on 12 June, titled Clockwork Angels. The holy trinity of Lee, drummer Neil Pert and guitarist Alex Lifeson recorded the album at Revolution Recording in Toronto, Canada and finished in Blackbird Studio in Nashville, Tennessee. Two singles have already been released including the hammer-on filled, bass-driven 'Headlong Flight' and the fret-bending 'Caravan'. Clockwork Angels is the band's first album in five years and naturally, Lee broke out a barrage of Fender Jazz basses for the recording of the album, as well as his array of bass synths, keyboards and abstract effects. Plans for a tour are soon to be announced.

Bassist Mickey Madden and Maroon 5 have completed work on their fourth album, Overexposed, which will be released on 26 June. Madden and his bandmates claim that this is their "poppiest" album yet, and if their last single 'Moves Like Jagger' is any indication, then we can assume they're not kidding (tell me you're not singing it in your head now?). Madden, who now plays Fender Jazz and Precision basses, shows his swagger on the album's first single, 'Payphone'. Tour dates are soon to be announced.

Though he's never out of the public eye for long, it would be remiss not to mention that Les Claypool and Primus will be hitting the summer stages this month, completing their long run of shows in support of their recent album, Green Naugahyde. Reunited with original drummer Jay Lane, Claypool and guitarist Larry LaLonde are covering a large chunk of the US on this stretch, beginning with Gilloiz Theatre in Springfield, MO on June 1 and ending the jaunt to June 23 at the Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium in Santa Cruz, California. The band is evidently excited to be playing the material from Green Naugahyde live, which mixes the usual jaw-dropping basswork of Claypool and the quirkiness for which the band is known.

Get your tickets now and prepare for a night of masterful thumb work…

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The Bass Scholarship

With winner Ellen O'Reilly

Fáilte, BGM friends! Lots of very exciting developments have occurred in recent weeks that I would like to share with you. Firstly, I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate the 2012 Bass Scholarship winner, Tiffany Burrow from Australia, who is keeping the female bass winner streak going! I met her on the day of the final and look forward to getting to know her when she comes to study at the Institute in September. Since appearing at the London Bass Guitar show I have also have received a little more attention and landed myself some very cool gigs and opportunities; I am now the bassist for an up-and-coming Irish artist, Shannon, and we've already had a TV appearance on *The Saturday Night Show*. I have lots of gigs coming up with an Irish rock band, Preacher's Son, who feature Brian Hogan from the well-known group Kila. I'm a Kila fan, so this is also a big thrill for me and both bands' gigs require me to play shows back home in Ireland and here in the UK.

I've since met up with rock bass legend Neil Murray (Whitesnake, Brian May), who invited me to sit in at a performance of *We Will Rock You*, where I got to see the master at work. He provided me with the entire music score and headphones, so I got a feel for what it's like to play at a top West End show. The band are split into two sections who are situated at both ends of the stage and are visible from the audience. The musical director, percussionist and keyboardists are on one side with bass, drums and two guitars on the other. Everyone has their own in-ear system with a monitor, so they can all watch the MD for cues. As well as the MD, they also have a click track in their in-ear systems. Each song in the set has a storyline cue, so an actor would say an important line and that would begin the next song. I got on great with the guys, and Neil has even offered to bring me as his guest to the 10th anniversary *WWRY* show and after party, which will include lots of well-known faces, including Queen's Brian May and Roger Taylor – so I had better stuff my purse full of business cards!

If you'd like to check out what I'm up to, please feel free to take a look at the following websites. Slán!

www.lowendlady.com
www. shannonofficial.com
www.preachersson.com

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Bassically Speaking

New, hot and funky bass players introduce themselves

Neal Mitchell Templeton Pek

I hate to shatter egos, but most people who listen to records don't listen for bass-lines. If people haven't noticed your playing, then you've done your job well. I would describe my bass style as pretty straight-up rock. As I am also the main vocalist and we are a three-piece, my role is to fill out the sound as much as I can, not showboat bass licks. I don't play five/six-string bass, because I don't see the point or need in overcomplicating things, plus it really is a sound that wouldn't suit us. Slapping is a style that doesn't fit our music, either. We're a three-piece fast rock outfit, not the Red Hot Chili Peppers. Punk not funk. The secret of playing bass well is keeping it simple. You can be the most technical bass player in the world in your bedroom, but if you can't lock into simple grooves with the rest of the band, you aren't much use.

My first bass was a Fender Jazz in vintage white. My favourite bass ever to date is my Ibanez ATK200, for many reasons. It may be an inexpensive model but live-wise it is ideal; it encompasses bits of all my favourite basses in one easy package. The twang of a Fender Jazz, the drive of an Ernie Ball Music Man and the depth of a Gibson Firebird... and it's a tenth of the weight. My bass heroes are Steve Harris from Iron Maiden: he plays super-fast and writes most of Maiden's songs. I would also have to say Sting, being a singer/bass player. But as far as the punk genre, it would be Joe Principe from Rise Against. The greatest bass player that ever lived? I'll probably get slaughtered as I'm not saying John Paul Jones, but for me it's simplicity, consistency, sheer volume and being a vocalist/bass player, so Paul McCartney. If I could get the bass tone of any album, I would say a cross between *The Colour And The Shape* by the Foo Fighters and *The Sufferer And The Witness* by Rise Against.
www.templetonpekofficial.com

GEAR
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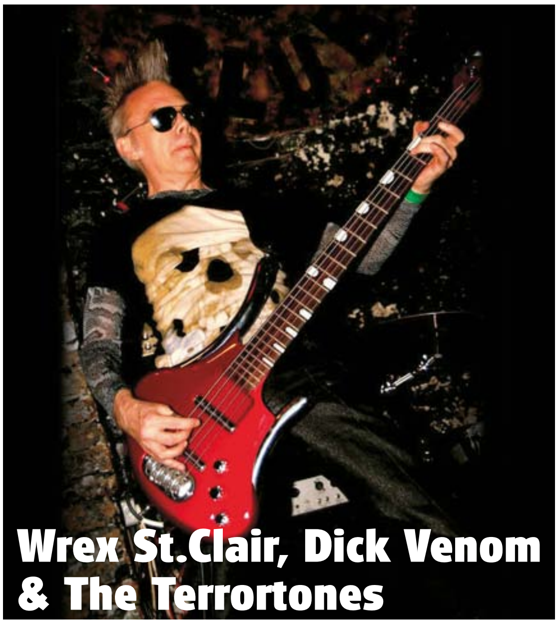
Effects Tech 21 Sansamp, Boss OS-2 overdrive
Amp Laney Nexus Tube

James Lant, Where's Billy

The greatest bass player that ever lived is, for me, Tim Commerford as I'm such a massive Rage Against The Machine fan. If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, I would choose *Renegades* by RATM: I just love how heavy the bass sounds on this album. My bass style is tight and punchy. We tune down for most of our songs and the necks on the four- strings hold up pretty well to it, so I don't need a five-string. I don't play slap bass in Where's Billy as there is really no place for it in our songs: from time to time I pop notes, but not very often. I play about 80 per cent of our songs with a pick. The secret of playing bass well is complementing the song: it's easy to overplay bass guitar for selfish reasons. You really have to sit back and find your place in the song. It's not about how many fills or notes you play: it's about the space between them. My first bass was a Fender Mustang copy made by Sunn. My dad and I stripped it down and gave it a custom paint job. I sold it to a friend and have been talking about buying it back for about the last five years, but I never seem to get around to it. My favourite bass ever? It's got to be my Cort C4 – it plays so well and produces a really powerful sound with its Mighty Mite soapbar pickups. It also has a custom pickguard due to a hornet-swatting incident where the pots caved into the body and split the wood. My bass heroes are Jeff Ament, Sam Rivers, Sid Vicious and Billy Gould to name but a few.
www.myspace.com/ukbandwheresbilly

GEAR
Bass Cort C4, Ibanez SG, Ibanez BTB
Effects None
Amp SWR Super Redhead Combo, Laney RB9 head, Hartke 2x10" Transporter Series cab



Wrex St.Clair, Dick Venom & The Terrortones

I've been playing 5-string basses since I bought my second bass over 20 years ago. I'd just come off a stint of mostly playing synths, and I wanted a bass guitar that could compete with the low notes I was getting from those instruments. I don't always use these extra notes, but they're always available should I need them. In the meantime, the B-string makes an excellent thumb rest. I would like to think that my style adapts to suit the songs I am playing. However, my preferred style could be described as driving but melodic, punchy but pretty. Listen to the song and what the other instruments are doing, especially the drums and the vocals: you need a shot of tequila and a load of balls.

My first bass was a Burns Sonic bass. This pretty much shaped how my bass playing developed due to its strengths (the fat, melodic tone) and weaknesses (no definable notes from the E string). I would have been a completely different bass player had my first bass been a Fender clone. My favourite bass ever to date is the Gus G3. Simon Farmer has produced an instrument that combines stunning looks with effortless playability and great sounds. I couldn't ask for anything more. I consider myself a songwriter before being a bass player, so for me a great song is what it is all about. My favourite songs tend to have very simple bass parts – that's what suits the song best – and a lot of them are sequenced synth parts. However if you're going to twist my arm and make me nominate a bass hero, I'll say Peter Hook of Joy Division and New Order, because he completely redefined what the bassist's role could be. The greatest bass player that ever lived? Playing music is not a competition. There is no 'greatest bass player.' On the other hand, if you don't secretly aspire to that title yourself, then I would suggest you lack ambition.

www.dickvenom.com

GEAR

Bass Gus G3 5-string
Effects Bass Pod, Linn Adrenalinn
Amp Tech Soundsystems Black Cat, EBS speakers

© Jon Iraundegi

David González, Berri Txarrak

My band name means 'Bad News' in Basque, the Basque Country's native language, since that is where we come from. We have just released our seventh album titled (*Haria (Thread)*) produced by Ross Robinson. I also play with my other band, Cobra. I don't consider myself a very technical player. When I play, I focus more on the energy I put in every single note I hit. I play a four-string bass. Paul McCartney, Phil Lynott, Geezer Butler, Steve Harris, Berry Oakley, Noel Redding… they never needed more than four strings. Rock is spelled with four strings. I don't slap, because we are in the 21st century. The 80s and 90s are long gone. Besides, when it comes to expressing myself, it is not the type of language I am interested in. The secret of playing bass well is being truthful and genuine in every single note you play. There are no rules that tell you how to do it. You must look for your own path, trying to find your strengths and virtues and using them wisely. Every time you play, you play for the song, not just for yourself. My first bass was a Hurricane. It weighed 15 kilos! It belonged to my brother, but I would steal it and use it whenever I could.

My favourite bass ever to date is my '66 Fender P-Bass. My bass heroes are Cliff Burton, Billy Gould, Rex Brown and Trevor Dunn. There are too many great players to mention and it is too complicated to choose just one, but I think it would be fair if I said Cliff Burton was one of the greatest. He died way too soon and he left a great legacy in music. His style was unique, he had technique, great power, an amazing stage presence and he was very sensitive and tasteful when it came to writing. He was not only a player with personality, but a real musician.

www.berritxarrak.net

GEAR

Bass Fender Precision, Gibson Ripper
Effects 105Q Crybaby Bass Wah, Fulltone Bass Drive, MXR MC 401, Boss LS2, Avalon U5, Sansamp RBI
Amp Ampeg SVT2 and SVT4 heads, 8x10" cabs

In the Groove

Music and more from the bass world, reviewed and rated by Mike Flynn and Ben Cooper

CD REVIEWS

Lorenzo Feliciati
Frequent Flyer

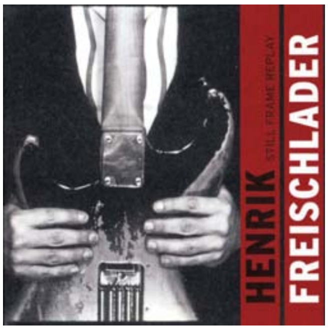
BGM RATING ★★★

Although the bass plays a support role in most music, and indeed its true strength lies in being able to make people shake their money-maker, ever since Jaco players have been exploring and pushing at the limits of the bass as a lead instrument and compositional tool. One such player who clearly owes much to Mr. Pastorius is Italy's Lorenzo Feliciati. With his rapid fingerstyle lines and nasal tone, it's hard to think of anyone else except Jaco. For a shining example of this, take 'Groove First', which has JP's DNA running right through it. This album is an all-instrumental fusion-fest. Feliciati ably swaps between band-leading soloist and a supportive role, and the compositions are, in their way, dark and atmospheric. However it's not an album for the faint-hearted. There's no doubting Lorenzo's obvious technical skill, or those of his bandmates, but musically speaking there's little here to grab any but the hardest of jazz-fusion heads. **[BC]**

Mike Stern
All Over The Place

BGM RATING ★★★★

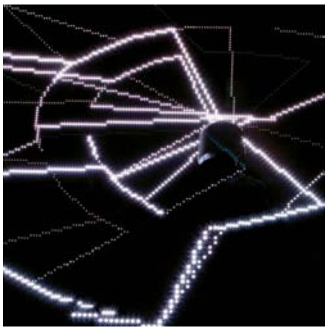
Some 27 years into his recording career as a solo artist and guitar supremo, Mike Stern shows no sign of running out of steam. In fact, *All Over The Place* is arguably the best album he's made in years. It's not that recent efforts such as *Who Let The Cats Out* and *Big Neighbourhood* missed the mark, but after hearing the unabashed full-throttle performances here, they feel like something of an entrée to this smorgasbord of jazzy delights. Stern always surrounds himself with virtuoso players: the A-list players here include labelmate Esperanza Spalding, jazz heavyweight Dave Holland, Victor Wooten, Tom Kennedy, Victor Bailey, Anthony Jackson, Will Lee and longstanding collaborator Richard Bona. The rest of the band aren't too shabby either, with tenor sax monster of the moment Chris Potter, trumpet icon Randy Brecker and Miles Davis's former alto sax demon Kenny Garrett among the killer horns that pop up throughout the set. Keys man Jim Beard and drum stars Dave Weckl, Kim Thompson, Al Foster and Keith Carlock all deliver the goods as well. Yet it's Stern's razor-sharp writing and some fired-up improvising that combine for some genuinely thrilling moments. Highlights include the Steely Dan-flavoured opener 'AJ', with Potter's sax going stratospheric; 'Cameroon' with Bona in almost symphonic vocal form; and the explosive 'Out Of The Blue' with Brecker's trumpet in overdrive. Being one of the great guitarists of all time is one thing: making great albums is another, and Stern has ticked both these boxes in emphatic style here. **[MF]**



Henrik Freischlader
Still Frame Replay

BGM RATING ★★★★

How many artists would love the endorsement of Joe Bonamassa? A fair few, we'd wager. When the current doyen of the blues guitar world guests on your album and talks in glowing terms of your music, it'll make plenty of people sit up and take notice. For those who do, Henrik has put together a tidy little album that, while not exactly groundbreaking or genre-redefining, is certainly worthy of the praise he's been attracting in recent years. Handling guitar and bass duties, Henrik manages to avoid sounding like a guitarist playing bass. Although there's nothing scintillating for bassists here, he shows taste and groove throughout, and nowhere is this more evident than on the album's slower numbers. 'Gentleman' features a weaving melodic line, with some tasteful fills, while the jazz-flecked 'I've Got It Good' has a simple but effective walking line underpinning it. **[BC]**



Squarepusher
Ufabulum

BGM RATING ★★★★

Dubstep's all-pervading wobble is permeating every stratum of music today – even Justin Bieber is having a go – so it's a relief when someone as musically heavy as Tom Jenkinson, better known as Squarepusher, dives into the low-frequency fray to restore some sense of credibility. Jenkinson's all-consuming instrumental abilities, not least as a ferocious bass guitarist, have seen him explore some of the most extreme musical terrain of any artist today. Bursting onto the scene in 1996 with the wildly funky *Feed Me Weird Things*, it was his incendiary all-electronic album *Go Plastic* that pushed his style into the red. *Ufabulum* arrives some 10 years on – an epic, synthesised set that switches his attention from annihilating breakbeats to synth bass-lines. It's an album of two halves: the melodic, post-rave pads and catchy hooks of '4001', 'Unreal Square' and 'Stadium Ice' make for an almost genteel first section, then the murky sci-fi chords of 'Red In Blue' provide a moment of calm before things get scary. The following four tunes, 'The Metallurgist', 'Drax 2', 'Dark Steering' and '303 Scopem Hard' rank among the darkest, most dangerous music Jenkinson has every produced, with frequencies violently twisted into painful, sonic spikes. Each tune has an intricate audiovisual narrative behind it, with Jenkinson designing an interactive light show to accompany these nightmarish sounds for added visceral effect. This album isn't for everyone, yet through his jaw-dropping command of synthetic sound, time and sonic space, Jenkinson actually brings a dark humanity, even warmth, to this seismic bassquake of a record. **[MF]**

Hannes Riepler Band
The Brave

BGM RATING ★★★

British jazz has a long and proud history, and London's international population has had nothing but positive effects on our home-grown stars. There's no better case in point here, as some of our brightest young jazz sparks coalesce around London-based Austrian guitarist Hannes Riepler for this classy debut album. These include Mercury Prize-nominated pianist Kit Downes, tenor saxophonist Tom Challenger and a strong rhythm team of bassist Ryan Trebilcock and drummer Jon Scott. What helps things gel beyond the purely cosmetic aspect of putting such a band together are Riepler's compositions, which offer hearty melodies and lush harmonies that Downes adeptly explores, while also providing plenty of breathing space for his own tasteful guitar work to take flight. Thus *The Brave* is both assured and airy, contemporary jazz without the usual overworked muso intricacies. Instead, Riepler making a convincing case as a name to expect even greater things from, as his music grows and matures further. **[MF]**

A perfect example of Swallow's ability to swing like an upright bassist, his wide, warm tone cushioning anything Baron or the pianist can throw at him.

Steve Kuhn/Steve Swallow/ Joey Baron Wisteria

BGM RATING ★★★

When played at the highest level, jazz enables the kind of conversational interaction between musicians that carefully scripted song structures and tightly wound riffing simply doesn't allow. Thus this superlative trio set from three friends feels like eavesdropping on a free-flowing, yet engaging dialogue between three of the music's most eloquent 'speakers'. Pianist Kuhn is now in his 70s, with his stellar career including early stints with sax giants John Coltrane (just before McCoy Tyner replaced him) and Stan Getz, and his playing sparkles with gently virtuosic touches and oozes harmonic sophistication. Meanwhile, electric bass great Steve Swallow and the supremely dynamic drummer Joey Baron combine effortlessly. Kuhn and Swallow's simpatico style is based on no fewer than 50 years of playing together: they first met in legendary trumpeter Art Farmer's band, and indeed the album takes it name from Farmer's piece 'Wisteria'. They've previously played on each other's solo projects, but for all that, this is their first encounter in a lean and mean trio and the results don't disappoint. After beginning meditatively on three Kuhn originals, they accelerate into high gear with a smouldering take on Carla Bley's 'Permanent Wave', which dovetails nicely into the fast bop of Kuhn's 'A Likely Story'. The latter provides a perfect example of Swallow's ability to swing like an upright bassist, his wide, warm tone cushioning anything Baron or the pianist can throw at him and his timing as steady as a rock, yet harmonically fluid and continually evolving. This contrasts wonderfully with Swallow's sensitive, guitaristic lead melody on 'Pastorale', his exquisite plectrum work giving the lie to those that think picks are just for metalheads. Overall, 'Wisteria' captures a riveting trio-logue from three of jazz's most articulate orators. **[MF]**

Squackett Squackett

BGM RATING ★★★

Few collaborations between successful musicians yield much in the way of aural satisfaction. Even when such ventures are labelled 'projects' instead of supergroups, the inability of those involved to even get near the quality of music that made them famous is almost taken as a given. The new album from the duo of Chris Squire and Steve Hackett manages to steer clear of a similar fate, mainly because they've clearly set out to make music that is as much for themselves as for other people. Squire is on top form, as you'd expect; check out the finger-knotting line that leads into the psychedelic solo section of album opener 'A Life Within A Day' for evidence. His signature growling, Rickenbacker-fuelled tone, which comes to the fore throughout *The Fish*, proves that he's still got it. Fans of out-there prog with dozens of time changes in a chorus will most likely be disappointed, though: Chris and Steve have tried to keep things melodic and song-based throughout, but there are plenty of chops on show. Unfortunately the album as a whole sounds pretty dated, and although there are moments where you feel they're about to take off ('A Life Within A Day', 'Stormchaser') it just never happens. Fans of either musician's output should check *Squackett* out, but it's unlikely to create any new fans. **[BC]**

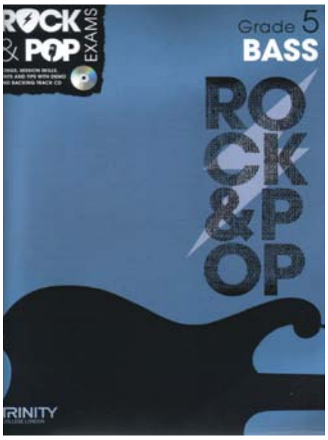
His signature growling, Rickenbacker-fuelled tone, which comes to the fore throughout The Fish, proves that he's still got it.

Jazz Soul Seven Impressions Of Curtis Mayfield

BGM RATING ★★★★

'Tribute' and 'album': two words that tend not to have a happy relationship. While re-recording songs by another artist can be a fitting testament to the impact of their work, the results are usually best forgotten about. Quickly… Not so with this delightful album by Jazz Soul Seven. They've taken some of soul legend Curtis Mayfield's tunes and re-imagined them as jazzy instrumentals. There's a genuine love and affection on display here, as the band work through everything from Mayfield's monster hit 'Move On Up', to songs from the ***Superfly*** soundtrack ('Freddie's Dead' and 'Superfly') and The Impression's ballad 'I'm So Proud'. By taking some of Mayfield's finest work and spinning it off into a different musical genre, the JS7 have masterfully avoided the cardinal sin of tribute albums: sounding like a weak covers act. Bob Hurst provides the tightest bass playing you've heard in a long time from his upright, with masterful walking lines and a deep, grooving pocket. Although the omission of Mayfield's excellent, and often socially-charged lyrics saps something from the songs, this is still an excellent album that fans of the man, or just cool swinging jazz, should grab immediately. **[BC]**

BOOK REVIEW



Most British readers will be familiar with Trinity College, the London institution which awards a range of artistic and educational 'grades' from primary school and upwards. Many of us never get further than a Grade 2 in recorder, or Grade 4 in piano or whatever, which is where readers over 40 will start complaining that 'in our day' there was no grade system for bass guitar. These youngsters nowadays, they don't know how lucky they are, and so on and so on…

Well, I'm an old git – and I would love to have had access to Trinity's new book range devoted to bass when I was a kid, instead of being forced to learn to play a crappy old xylophone with most of the bars missing. The six books here, from Initial level to Grade 5, synch with Trinity's website in a genuinely useful way, explaining exactly what you need to be able to play in order to get through each Grade. In each case the score and tab for a bunch of songs is provided, so that the learner can master them before moving on – and another major difference from the old days is that kids can now play songs by the Ramones, Radiohead, Green Day, The Who and a load of cool bands instead of 'Kumbaya' or 'Morning Has Broken' or any of the other miserable old dirges we had to struggle with back in the 80s. (I know this review shouldn't just be a vehicle for my own resentment… I'm trying, I'm trying.)

Each book comes with a CD to enable tuning and playalong, another innovation that wouldn't have worked back in the day because books weren't big enough to put vinyl records in. The range of technical skills that the student is required to master when you get up to Grade 5 is interesting, because the syllabus has clearly been put together by a team of musicians who know exactly what bassists really need to make a living, not just general advanced theory, which is about as useful in real life as an ashtray on a motorbike. For example, the learner needs to study syncopation, picking accuracy and – get this! – the correct application of distortion. Now how cool is that? In the old days if I'd suggested to my music teacher that we study distortion, or any effects for that matter, I would have been birched, stood in the corner with a dunce's hat on and then expelled and forced to work in a coal mine. OK, I'm exaggerating… a bit.

Amazing stuff, issued just in time for the beginning of Trinity's new Rock & Pop syllabus. Each book costs £13.99, which might seem a lot if you have to buy all of them, but then again kids spend 50 quid every time they go to the corner shop these days and they all have iPads and whatnot, so the investment might be worth it. Grr. They don't know they're born. In my day… put 'em in the army… do 'em good… mumble… whine… Nurse! The Sanatogen! **[JM]**

TAKE FIVE
THIS MONTH'S STAR IS CHRIS SQUIRE

Chris Squire

The legendary Yes bass player Chris Squire digs deep

Currently moonlighting in a side project with fellow prog-rock alumnus Steve Hackett called – you guessed it – Squackett, Chris Squire has a pedigree (as well as a bass tone) that most of us would die for. On the eve of release of Squackett's debut self-titled album, Chris revisits five classic LPs featuring bass playing that he particularly admires.

The Who
My Generation (1965)

Of course, the iconic bass solo of all time is played by John Entwistle in 'My Generation'. I've got to tell you that over the years, I've tried to actually imitate it, but I really can't do it in the same way and with the same tone that he managed to achieve on the record. I thought I knew a thing or two about that sort of sound, but no… My education in bass guitar didn't really precede the Beatles or The Who. I was 15 in 1963 when the Beatles came out and I learned to play their songs. I'd see jazz pianists with amazing bassists playing string basses, and I'd think 'I'm not sure what that is, but it's not what I'm doing!'

The Beatles
Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (1967)

Paul McCartney was a great influence on me. He really knew what he was doing. All his bass parts are amazing, even though he was really a guitar player. When he teamed up with George Martin and they started doing those descending bass-lines, he might not necessarily have thought of playing like that when he was doing 'Long Tall Sally' in the early days, but then he started to move into this very English baroque style, especially with John Lennon's influence. You couldn't ask for a better recipe for success, actually.

The Rolling Stones
Their Satanic Majesties Request… (1967)

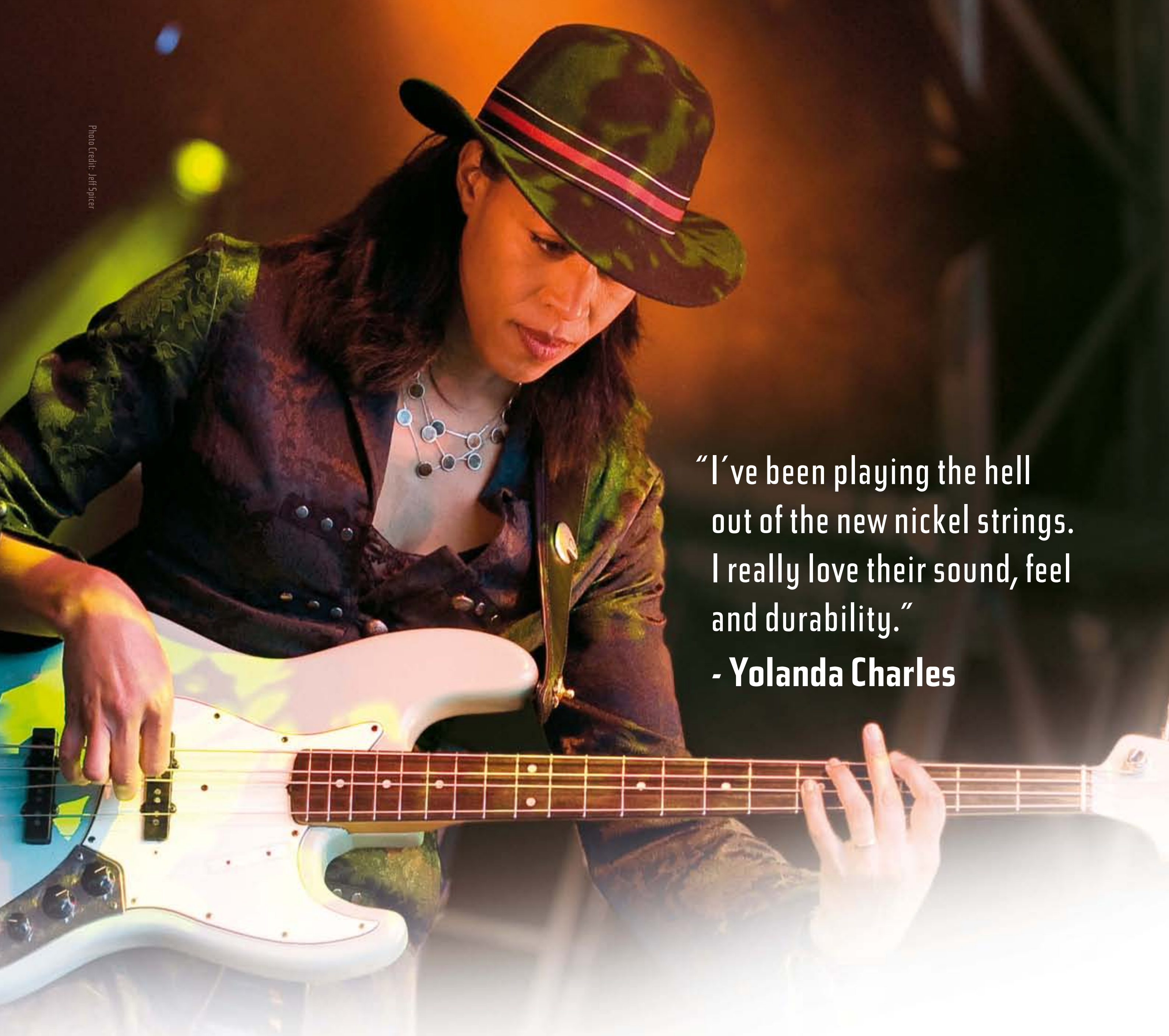
I had a great choice of bass-playing talent to listen to when I was a young man, of course, from Bill Wyman and beyond. He really was amazing, and he really impressed me when I was a kid. To me, he was a major part of the way the Stones swung, and they definitely did swing in a certain manner. Since Bill hasn't been with them, they haven't swung in the same way. It's a shame: I used to like the rhythm of their music. Then again, they're still a great band, even now that he isn't playing with them any more. There really isn't another band quite like the Rolling Stones.

Cream
Wheels Of Fire (1968)

Of course, another big influence on me was Jack Bruce, because I saw him play when I was at the exact age when I was learning to play: I remember being 15 years old, going to the Marquee Club and seeing the Graham Bond Organisation, which had Jack and Ginger Baker. Dick Heckstall-Smith played sax with them too, and that was a night of great music. Jack was really amazing in his bass playing and his harmonica playing. The Cream albums had great, memorable bass-lines: 'Sunshine Of Your Love' is in the dictionary under the best-known bass parts of all time.

Red Hot Chili Peppers
Mother's Milk (1988)

Shall I put a modern bass player in here, after all the early albums I've just mentioned? In that case, I definitely have to say Flea of the Red Hot Chili Peppers. He's a great player and he absolutely has to be in here, especially if you want to include Mother's Milk, the album where they covered Stevie Wonder's 'Higher Ground', which is a real highlight of the record in my opinion. Later on, a long time after this album was released, I got to know Flea quite well: he's a lovely man. A hell of a bass player, and his singing is very good, which is something that a lot of people don't know.



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John Entwistle 1944-2002

The late, ineffably great John Entwistle wasn't just an iconic bass player: he was a complex man of many faces. His long-time friend and Who expert Chris Charlesworth reveals the man behind the legend...

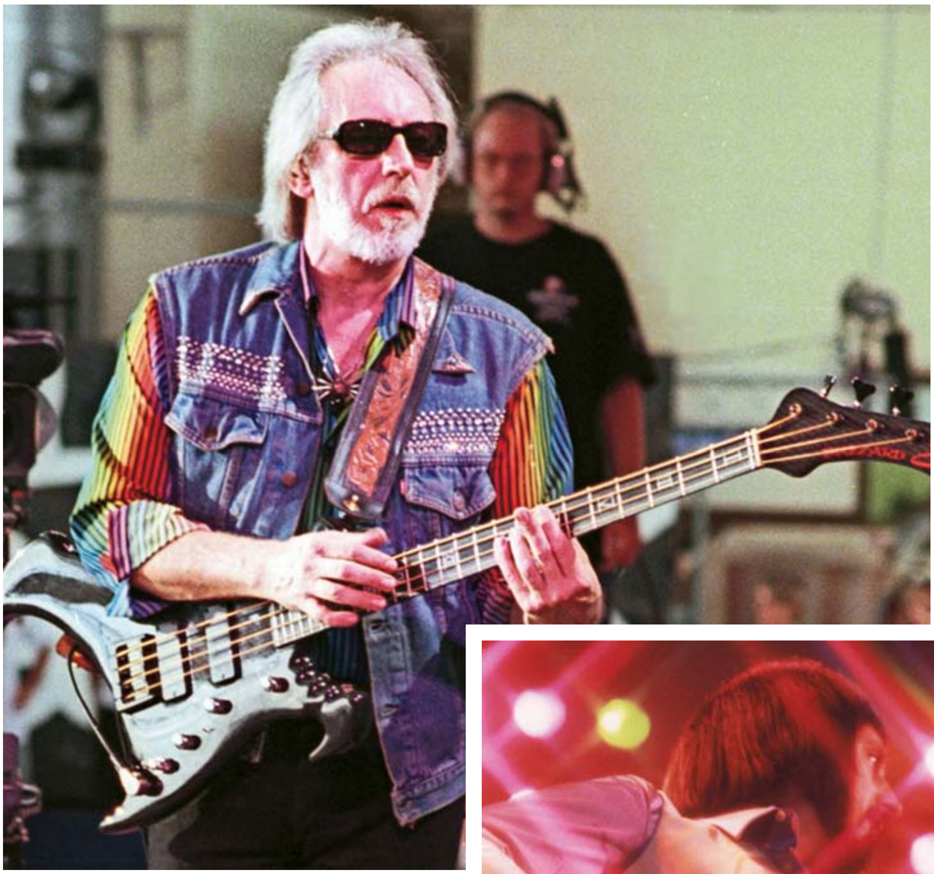
It's a cliché that celebrities tend to be shorter in real life than they appear on stage, and John Entwistle, who often wore brightly-coloured Cuban-heeled boots to raise his profile when he was out and about, was no exception to this. Yet in every other way, John was bigger in real life: louder, funnier, weirder, more outspoken, more whimsical, more macabre and certainly more scornful than most of the industry in which he worked for most of his 57 years.

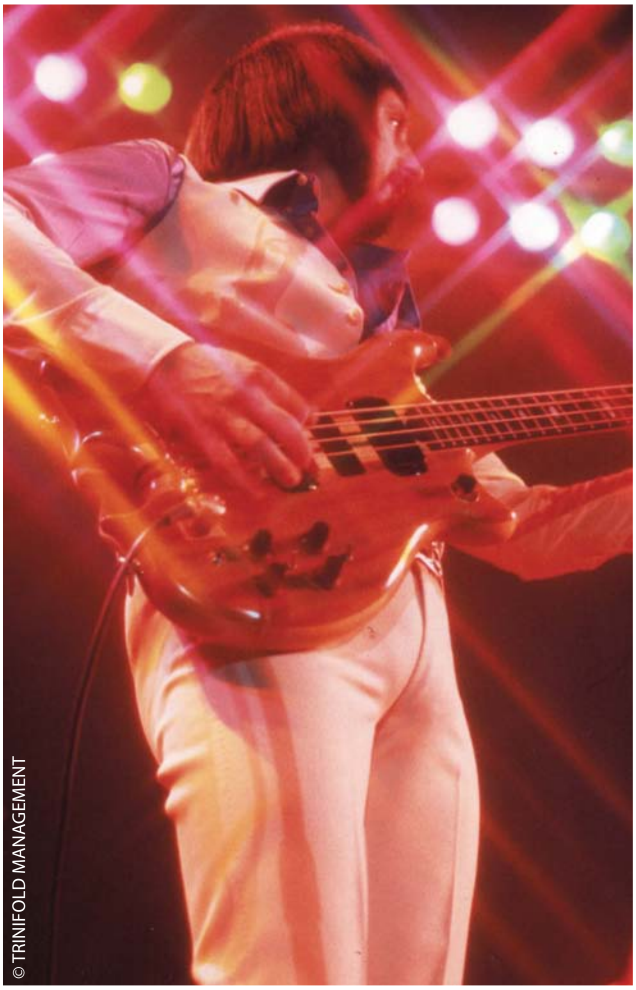
John was an enigma. That he was the best bass guitarist of his generation is not in dispute, but because of the peculiar demands placed upon him by The Who, he wasn't a bass player in the accepted sense of the term because he didn't play bass like anyone else, any more than Keith Moon played the drums like anyone else or, for that matter, Pete Townshend the guitar. "His playing was so dexterous and inventive that he was often indistinguishable from a second guitar," was the astute observation of former Who PR-man Keith Altham, in an appreciation of John posted on the Rock's Back Pages website. Audiences certainly heard John, but many thought that what they heard was being played by Townshend. When John first took his own band on the road in 1974 it sounded a lot like The Who, because John's style of playing and the sound he got from his equipment was unique. Only then did fans realise the full extent of his contribution to The Who. Conversely, when, after his death in 2002, The Who replaced John with Pino Palladino, seasoned observers noted John's absence, not just because his physical presence was missing stage left, but because the actual sound of The Who was no longer the same; it lacked his musical input, that huge and inimitable bass and mid-range harmonic, the Entwistle signature. John wrote a song entitled 'The Quiet One' because that was the way he thought he was perceived by fans, but in reality he was as loud as they come – and certainly as loud as anyone else in this spectacularly loud group.

More than anything else, John loved to play, to perform, to see and hear the crowds, yet he didn't appear as if he was enjoying himself up there. He rarely smiled on stage and, indeed, often looked bored to tears. He just stood there motionless, his fingers a blur as he plucked his bass strings with supreme skill and casual panache, except when he was called upon to sing one of his own Who songs, 'Boris The Spider', 'Heaven And Hell' or 'My Wife', to contribute backing vocals, or to step forward to rattle off a stunning solo bass part in 'Dreaming From The Waist' or '5.15'. After, as the crowds cheered him, he'd simply mumble a quick 'thank you' into the mic in his deep, crusty voice, then step back again into the hinterland of his immense speaker cabinets, and resume his seen-it-all-before demeanour.

He could be secretive, but at the same time very revealing. Pete Townshend didn't discover that John had been a Freemason for most of his life until the day of John's funeral. At that funeral the eulogy was given by a local innkeeper, who never once mentioned the bass guitar or even The Who. He did mention that John had bought a new roof for Stow-on-the-Wold's cricket pavilion, and that he was a valued customer at the town's many pubs and antique shops – but it seemed to this attendee as if John's life as a rock musician was not something that was widely discussed in the town where he made his home.

Interviewed by Tony Fletcher for his Keith Moon biography Dear Boy, however, John let fly with some home truths about his working life that were as revealing as any interview anyone in The Who ever gave, and candour was one of their many virtues. "I wasted my whole fucking career on The Who," he said between gulps of Remy Martin brandy, his favourite tipple. "Complete fucking waste of time. I should be a multi-millionaire. I should be retired by now. I'll be known as an innovative bass player. But that doesn't help get my





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"He just stood there motionless, his fingers a blur as he plucked his bass strings with supreme skill and casual panache"

swimming pool rebuilt and let me sit on my arse watching TV all day. I wouldn't want to, but I'd like the chance to be able to."

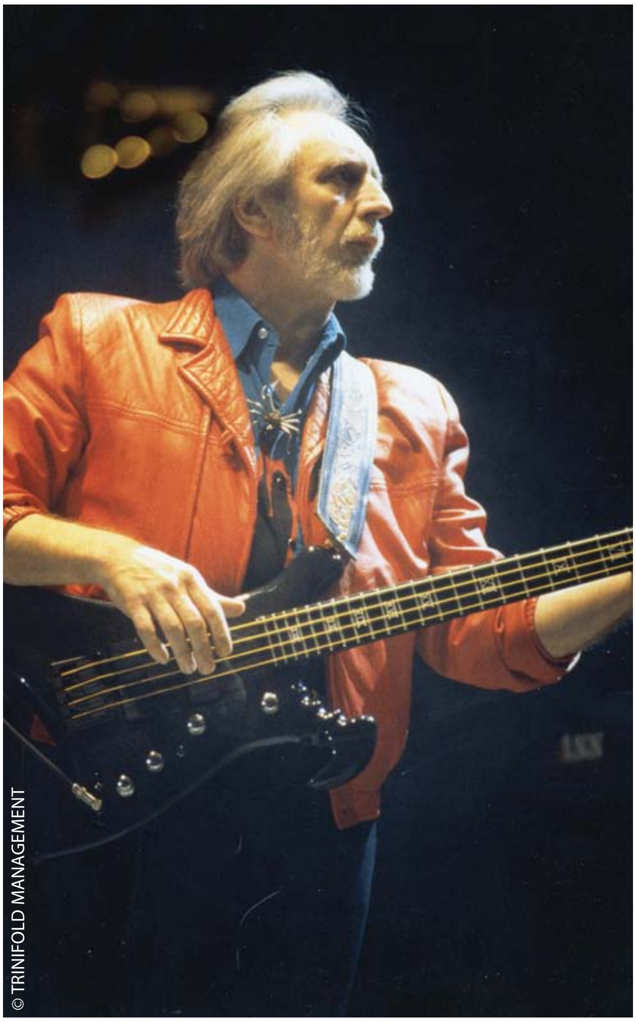
This interview took place in the mid-nineties, at a time when John's resentment at The Who's post-Moon stop-start career, itself a product of Townshend's need to find creative fulfilment elsewhere, was at its worst. There was also the gut-wrenching realisation that because of catastrophic business moves in the mid-sixties, The Who would never make anything like as much as they deserved in royalties from record sales. It's not hard to imagine John brooding over the rock star names in the Sunday Times Rich List: the individual Beatles, Stones, Floyds, Zeppelins and Queens, and, brandy bottle to hand, cursing his luck that he wasn't among them.

Time was, though, when the pride he took in his work was all the motivation he required, and woe betide anyone who might so much as think about usurping his position. Mountain guitarist Leslie West has recalled how John bristled when American bassist and producer Felix Pappalardi turned up with his bass amps to the aborted New York sessions for Who's Next in early 1971. "John came in and said, 'What's this?'" West told US writer Richie Unterberger. "Felix said, 'My bass amps.' John said, 'I'm the bass player in the fucking Who.' It got a little heated and he [Pappalardi] left."

John was a rocker at heart, inspired by the twangy guitar of Duane Eddy, yet he was in a band that surfed the mod craze of the early sixties, though to be fair so was Roger Daltrey. The songs on his solo albums reflect his love of fifties rock'n'roll, and also his well-known – but often tongue-in-cheek – black sense of humour. 'Do The Dangle' is a meditation on suicide by self-hanging, set to a 12-bar beat that would fit snugly alongside any of the daft American dance crazes of the era, while anyone privy to the way John's dark mind worked would know from the titles alone that 'Roller Skate Kate' and 'Peg Leg Peggy' were bound for a sticky end. Like many of his elite contemporaries in the bass trade – McCartney, Bruce, Jones – John came from a musical family and had some formal training as a musician. Until the endless cigarettes and other intoxicants ravaged his voice, he could sing from falsetto down to basso-profondo; "I'd like to help you son but you're too young to vote," his low register set-piece in 'Summertime Blues' was always a joy to hear.

From the mid-seventies until his death, John's main home was a gigantic hunting lodge called Quarwood on the outskirts of Stow, a 55-room pile set in 40 acres that always looked in need of a lick of paint. Suits of armour from medieval times greeted visitors who arrived by the front porch, an effigy of Quasimodo hung from a 40-foot bell rope in the hall, a human skeleton reclined gracefully in a Regency chair, and the walls of the downstairs loo were covered from floor to ceiling in gold discs. In the rarely-used kitchen – the household ate out a lot or ordered takeaways – were three huge birdcages that housed exotic and noisy parrots; from the ceiling of the much-used bar – the household drank in a lot and ordered bottles by the case – dangled scores of embalmed marlin, the crème de la crème of game fish; and tarantulas frolicked in a glass case in the living room. A bass rig designed for outdoor stadium use sat next to the bar and when John plugged-in, the din was such that my daughter, then six, ran screaming from the room. His pianola, too, was set at 11. John, of course, was nigh-on stone deaf by the nineties.

That particular visit to Quarwood was in order to discuss liner notes for a JAE 'best-of' album, which John had asked me to write. I had proposed that my wife design the sleeve and John acquiesced, so a family visit was in order. John's mum, Queenie, was quite taken with our infant son, and before I settled down with the master of



I invoiced him for the work I'd done on that CD sleeve, a cheque arrived by return post. When I invoiced Universal Music for work I'd done on other Who-related repackaging, I was still waiting for my money three months later. Then again, it did not pay to cross him. Who manager Bill Curbishley tells a wonderful tale of how Keith Moon, drunk as a skunk after a gig, entered John's luxurious Paris hotel suite where he and his first wife Alison were about to enjoy an intimate, candlelit meal. Moon bit a chunk out of John's steak, quaffed the vintage claret straight from the bottle, then staggered over to a corner to relieve himself on the carpet before collapsing, sparko, on the floor. John sat there impassively for a moment, then dragged Moon back to his own suite. Once inside, John smashed all the furniture to smithereens, shutting the door behind him. When Moon came to he thought he'd done the damage, and meekly paid up. Curbishley never told him the truth.

On another occasion, in Houston, Daltrey, eternally complaining about John's bass level, reprimanded him onstage by demanding that he "turn the fuck down". John countered with, "Well, you play the fucking thing then." The normally unflappable bassist then locked himself in the dressing room and refused to return for the encore. Curbishley tried in vain to persuade him otherwise, but John was livid and would not be assuaged. Curbishley finally pleaded through the door, "If you won't come back because of Roger, would you at least consider coming back for the 10,000 people outside that are cheering for you?" There was a silence and then a casual but gruff, "Yeah, I suppose I could do it for them."

John took great care of his appearance and I never once saw him looking scruffy, on stage or off. He generally rose in the late afternoon, immaculately dressed, and consumed a 'full English'. He was gregarious, sociable, especially to genuine Who fans, and, like Keith Moon, a first-rate host. The bar at Quarwood was the setting for many memorable parties. He was generous to his friends but, unlike Moon, wary of freeloaders. He was also a ladies man, courteous and worldly. He was married twice, fathered one son, Christopher, from his first marriage, and for the last 12 or so years of his life lived at Quarwood with an American girl called Lisa Pritchard-Johnson, a former beau of his great friend Joe Walsh. That in the remaining year of her own life Lisa would create a minor local scandal by becoming romantically linked with the married vicar of Stow, the same cleric who conducted his funeral service, would no doubt have caused John to collapse in gales of laughter.

John Entwistle died in bed in the arms of a good-time girl on June 27, 2002, in hotel room 658 at the Hard Rock Café & Casino in Las Vegas on the eve of a US tour by The Who that Townshend had agreed to do in order to shore up John's finances. An inquest decided that death was due to a cocaine-induced heart attack. "Sad though it is," said Roger Daltrey, "if he could have written an ending for himself it would have been very similar to the one he had." Few who had known John would disagree.

Chris C is grateful to fellow Who archivist Andy Neill for his assistance with this feature.

"A bass rig for stadium use sat next to the bar and when John plugged in my daughter ran screaming from the room"

the house in the recording studio to talk business he kindly offered to play a video of Snow White & The Seven Dwarves for my daughter, but accidentally inserted into his player a pornographic version of the age-old fairy tale. Fortunately his girlfriend Lisa was on hand to hit the stop button when she realised John's error.

Come to think of it, the first video player/recorder I ever saw was at John's house in Ealing in 1971. He loved gadgets and was happy to demonstrate it for me. It was enormous by modern day standards, a big grey contraption made by Philips, and the early cassettes were the size of cigar boxes. He told me it had cost him £800, no mean sum in those days. Outside in the drive was a black Cadillac stretch limousine, probably the only one in Britain. He'd taken a shine to them in America and had one shipped over. At Quarwood he had a green Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow that had been specially converted into a station wagon so that it could transport his pack of Irish wolfhounds.

John was an honourable man. When

For most of the seventies Chris Charlesworth was a staff writer on Melody Maker, subsequently becoming editor-in-chief at Omnibus Press, a position he has now held for 28 years. During his time on MM and in the years that followed, Charlesworth wrote extensively about The Who, establishing a close relationship with the group that resulted in Pete Townshend inviting him to sequence their 4-CD box set Thirty Years of Maximum R&B (1994) and oversee the wholesale renovation of the group's back catalogue on remastered CDs. He has also contributed liner notes to Who albums and solo 'best of' CDs by John Entwistle and Roger Daltrey.

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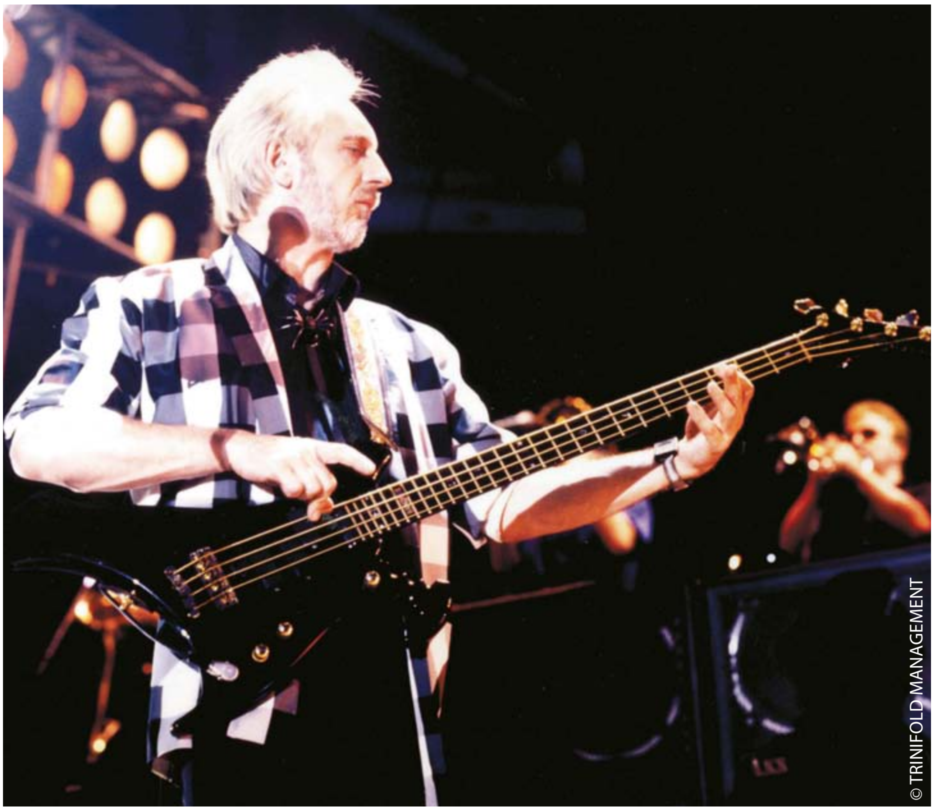
John Entwistle: Technique, Tone And Taste

Ben Cooper examines the technical side of the late, great Ox

Arguments about the greatest bass player who ever lived have been raging since... well, probably since more than one bass player walked the planet. One player who could justly lay claim to the crown of Greatest Bass Player Of All Time, however, is John Entwistle. Affectionately known as The Ox or Thunderfingers, Entwistle dragged the bass kicking and screaming to the forefront of popular music with a dynamic and energetic style that belied his quiet onstage persona. From his tone and technique to his creative bass lines that often outdid the guitar, The Ox's influence can be heard in the playing of Billy Sheehan, Geddy Lee, Les Claypool and hundreds of other top players. We're going to give you a quick rundown of The Ox's technique and gear so you can see why so many feel he's the greatest.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Style

Like many bassists of his era, and particularly in rock music, Entwistle wasn't averse to using a plectrum to give clarity and attack to his playing, and when he did use a plectrum it was a heavy-gauge chunk of plastic. However it's for his incredible variety of fingerstyle techniques that he will always be remembered. Usually anchoring his hand up by the neck, with his picking hand thumb at rest on the E-string, he favoured the standard two-finger approach, but was also adept at using all his digits for complex passages that ran across the strings. Although he would vary his touch according to a song's dynamics, he was a famous heavy-hitter – and this necessitated fresh strings for every gig.

Although somewhat dismissive of slap, Entwistle would often use a popping technique on the top strings, usually to play power chords and double stops. This allowed him to lay down textural, rhythm guitar style lines. Using his thumb he would then pluck bass lines on the lower strings. A related technique was his use of index finger and thumb in a 'claw' to play octave lines.

In terms of his fretting hand, it was all about hammer-ons and pull-offs, which were used to achieve the lightning fast runs and riffs that became John's signature style. At a time when most bass players (particularly in rock) were still restricted to root notes, triads and walking lines, this acrobatic playing would be a huge influence on players such as Steve Harris, Geddy Lee and Billy Sheehan.

No look at Entwistle's technique would be complete without looking at the technique he called the "typewriter". Some people confuse this with the two-handed tapping that Eddie Van Halen used to revolutionise guitar playing, which was later co-opted by all manner of bass players: however, Entwistle's typewriter style was quite different. While fretting his bass-lines as usual, John would tap his fingers against the end of the neck, usually around the last fret. This action would bounce the strings off the fretboard, creating a clicky, percussive attack. His ability to "type" across the strings with all four fingers enabled him to play bass-lines far beyond the reach of the traditional two-fingered approach. This technique is similar to coaxing tapped harmonics from a bass, so care needs to be taken to stop too many harmonics ringing out and making the bass sound become a mess, particularly with a treble or mid-heavy tone.

Gear

Throughout his long and illustrious career, John Entwistle played an enormous variety of basses and amps, often using a change in gear to help him get out of a perceived rut in his playing. As he famously collected many basses, it would be impossible to list all the instruments he used – but there are certain basses that were integral to his playing, and defined certain eras of his musical life.

Entwistle's very first bass was a homemade effort which sported a square neck. Essentially a Fender P-Bass copy, it was terrible by Entwistle's own admission, but it was a start. A genuine Fender Precision was his first 'real' bass, and he continued to use Precisions throughout his career. However, he was soon drawn

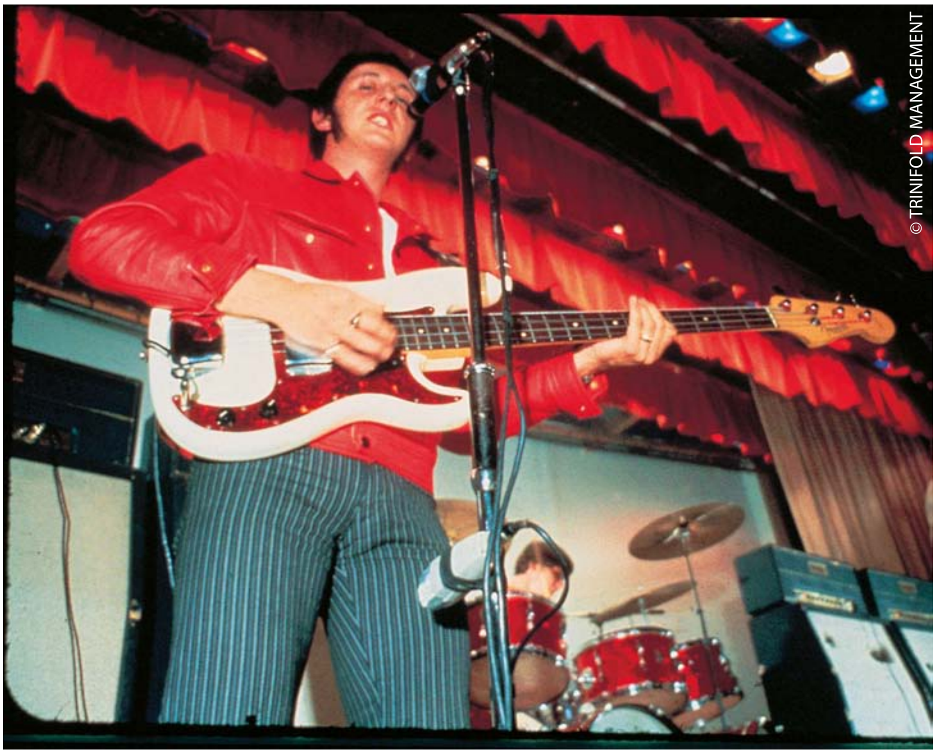
to a Danelectro Long Horn bass thanks to its clear and bright tone, which he likened to a piano, although he hit a snag with this particular bass when recording 'My Generation.' During those legendary solo breaks, he kept snapping the strings. Unfortunately replacements for the Long Horn were not available for purchase as they were thinner than standard strings, so he ended up buying two more basses just to get the tone he wanted. With the third bass

"Entwistle's first bass was a home-made effort, which was, by his own admission, terrible"

also suffering a snapped string, Entwistle bought a 1966 Fender Jazz, which he strung with LaBella tapewound strings and finally completed the solos.

Around the time of Quadrophenia, Entwistle was most commonly seen sporting a Gibson Thunderbird IV. At the time, the thudding bass-heavy Gibson was a new direction for a player who employed so much treble in his tone. He also had a modded 'Fenderbird' made up, which married the Gibson body and fittings with a Fender neck.

Always looking to mix things up, John used Alembic basses in the late 70s through to the 80s. He enjoyed the Alembic's ability to combine both biting highs and a full, clear bottom end, which he felt was perfect for his sound at the time. Perhaps the most iconic bass in Entwistle's armoury was the Buzzard. Initially designed in conjunction with German manufacturer Warwick, the Buzzard was made by several different companies during its lifetime. Looking for something a bit different, he sat down with Warwick's Hans Peter Wilfer and eventually came up with the distinctive body shape and beak-like headstock design. Although he was happy with the Warwick Buzzard, John also had some Buzzard basses built by Modulus and Status Graphite. Due to his love of an extremely low action, the use of graphite made a great deal of sense, as it meant the neck of the instrument wouldn't bow due to humidity and temperature changes – which meant an end to constant tinkering with the instrument to achieve the perfect action.



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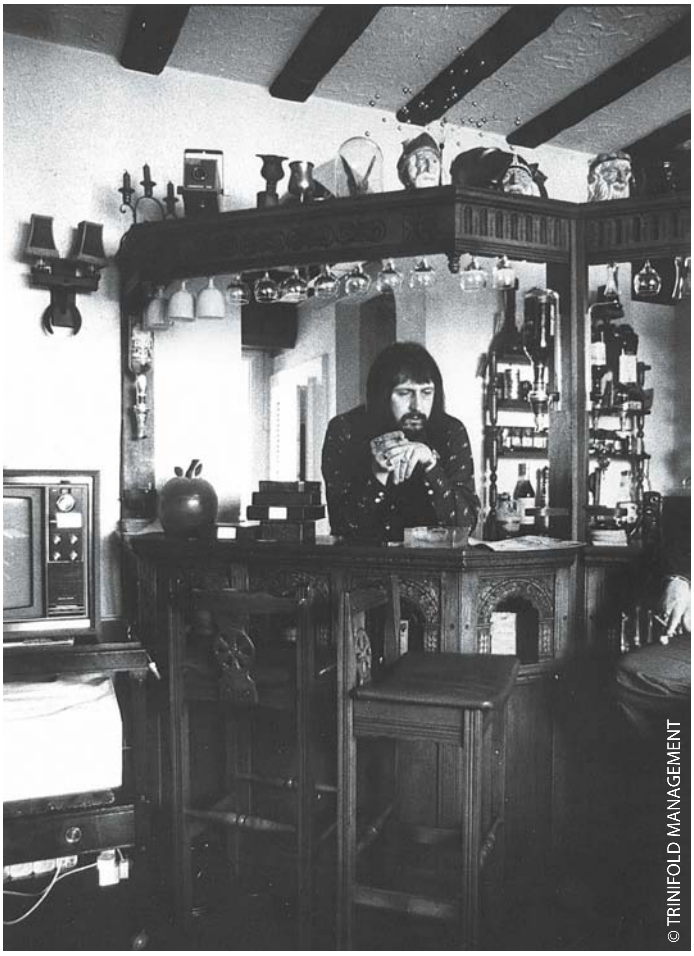

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Entwistle's amplification setup was as varied as his basses, but in the early days he favoured Marshall heads, using 100-watt heads to help him cut through the din of Townshend and Moon. He was also one of the first users of the now iconic Marshall 4x12" cab, which he used to push copious amounts of air. During the 70s, Sunn amps were his preferred choice. He also used to split the signal, a technique favoured by players who followed in his footsteps such as Geddy Lee and Billy Sheehan. By sending the treble and bass to separate amps, it was possible to achieve the distortion and high-end bite which he needed, without losing that all-important fat low end. Towards the end of his career John was using Ashdown amps, particularly for the low end, but was also incorporating a wide variety of other manufacturers' products such as Digitech and Trace Elliot for the midrange and treble frequencies.

An easily overlooked aspect of John's signature tone was his use of Rotosound roundwound strings. Although he used flatwound strings in the early days, a visit to the Rotosound factory led to him being involved in the development of their iconic Swing Bass roundwound strings. The inherent brightness and clarity of the strings compared to flatwounds was the perfect complement to the treble-rich tone he preferred, helping him cut through the guitars and drums.

So was John Entwistle the greatest bass player ever? That's for you to decide, perhaps after watching his bass solo for The Who's performance at the Royal Albert Hall in 2000 – but one thing that can never be questioned is the way he reshaped the face of bass playing for his own generation, and beyond.

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CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MASTER

Upright genius and jazz guru Christian McBride shows both sides of his swing with two new albums. Interview: Jon D'Auria.

The past year has been one of groundbreaking triumph for the king of upright bass, Christian McBride. Not only did the 40-year-old virtuoso release his first ever big band album, The Good Feeling, but he also unveiled his debut duets record, Conversations With Christian. While there are obvious differences between McBride conducting an 18-piece ensemble and playing with his closest friends in the duo format, the signature deep-pocketed sound that has fueled his long and fruitful career is present in both. Lacing together swinging movements with contemplative ballads, and capping them off with peaks of hand-clapping funk, McBride's skill with composition shines throughout both discs, binding the traditions of vintage jazz with modern soul. To call these albums masterpieces may be an understatement.

With a remarkable career under his belt, McBride is currently working harder than ever to solidify his place in the jazz history books and hold up the foundation of the genre, while also passing the torch to a younger generation of players. While that may seem like a massive undertaking to some, McBride assumes the responsibility in the same manner that he navigates his basslines, with smooth confidence and enough swing in his step to sway a ship. However, for his most recent releases, the impetus is simple: he takes compositions that he loves, brings in his closest musician friends to execute them and sees what develops in the end. For a man who has made a career of backing and supporting artists such as Sting, Chick Corea, Pat Metheny, Sonny Rollins, Paul Simon, Quincy Jones, Ray Brown and John McLaughlin, the formula couldn't fail. And, naturally, it didn't. But rather than focus on the formidable work that it took to execute such tasks, McBride did what he always does and just found the groove of it all.

"When I'm playing and writing for the big band, I'm not thinking solely about the bass – I'm thinking of the music as a whole and the bass in the bigger picture"

"With the big band, I know what's coming. With the duets I had no idea what was coming my way," explains McBride. "When I'm playing and writing for the big band, I'm not thinking solely about the bass – I'm thinking of the music as a whole and the bass in the bigger picture. With the duets, my antenna is up and I'm really reacting to and fueling ideas in this atmosphere of creativity, where you don't know what's next. In the big band, you know what sections are where and who plays what. The only link between the two is that I need to have a strong groove in whatever I play. It doesn't always have to be swinging, but there has to be a rhythmic component that the listener can grab on to and ride."

The liner notes of Conversations reads like a who's who of jazz music from the past several decades. The selected duets pair McBride with some of his closest friends and collaborators from his past, including vocalist Angelique Kidjo, violinist Regina Carter, rock icon Sting, master trumpeter Roy Hargrove, singer Dee Dee Bridgewater, pianist George Duke, Chick Corea and a handful of other greats. As impromptu as this project may seem, it turns out that its conception occurred long before it was finally executed. "When I signed with Verve in the 90s, the idea came up then, but I didn't particularly feel like doing it at the time," explains McBride. "Since then I've had the chance to work with a lot of different people and do a lot of different diverse projects, so it felt like now was the right time to do a widespread duets album. I just sat down and made a wish list of people who I wanted to work with on this, and there's going to have to be a Volume Two because we couldn't fit everyone on this project, I can tell you that right now."

Slightly less intimate in nature, McBride's big band brings to life masterful orchestration and ambitious composition that is reminiscent of the big bands once commanded by Charles Mingus and Ray Brown. Songs like 'Science Fiction', 'Broadway' and the only track to appear on both albums, 'Shake And Blake', swing no end. Meanwhile, 'A Taste Of Honey' and 'When I Fall In Love' meld beautifully with the velvet voice of singer Melissa Walker. The album is as eclectic as it is powerful, showing McBride's potential as

a bandleader and composer. "There are many different reference points in the big band world that have a huge influence on me," says McBride. "There's the Mingus-style big band, the more traditional Oscar Pettiford big band style and there's the Jaco Pastorius big band style. There are so many different ways to write for big bands. For me, I get really inspired by film and television music. I'm not ashamed to say that some television theme songs have influenced my big band composing. There's always a combination of all of the examples I just mentioned in style, but I mix it with some silly cartoon music going along with it. Like any other artist, I'm influenced by a whole lot of different things. I think Charlie Parker put it best when he sad, 'To be the best artist you can be, you have to learn everything you possibly can about music – and then forget every bit of it.'"

McBride began his longstanding relationship with the bass when he picked

"Sometimes I do my best writing on bass, and other times I like to work out chord structures on the keys. It depends on my mood and the song."

up an electric four-string in grade school (primary school for British readers). After he quickly adapted to the nuances and challenging techniques that come with playing in jazz ensembles, McBride decided to shift his attention to the upright bass, which quickly became his musical home and created his voice as an artist. While he often writes on the bass, he also uses the piano to craft his compositions, especially for his big band. "My natural inclination is to go to the piano first for composing, but on a song like 'Shake And Blake' I had the feeling that if I expanded it on bass, it would be a really good big band composition," says McBride. "So when I have my composer's hat on, I think of how I can arrange the melody for five saxophones and a huge band. But then I stopped myself and decided that we can play the bass and saxophone like we always do. There's nothing wrong with that. There are a lot of different approaches that I take; sometimes I do my best writing on bass, and other times I like to work out chord structures on the keys. It depends on my mood and the song in particular."

With his schedule currently full of tour dates and appearances for both recent

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McBride with the great Chick Corea

projects, McBride is already looking ahead to the next installments of his duets and big band works. These include a multitude of new artists, as well as new concepts for them to conquer. "I just want to collaborate with different people on the next duets album. I love the duo format because it's completely exposed. You have to get out of your head, so to speak. I want to record with people in a lot of different genres. You're one of the first people I've told this to, but I want to try to get Little Richard on the next album. I think he turns 80 this year, so I want to catch him now. What I'm thinking about doing with my next big band record is to take the arrangements I've done through the years for specific projects for different people, and play some of those arrangements with some of the people I wrote them for. Like Maceo Parker, Russell Malone, Dianne Reeves and Fred Wesley – musicians like that. I'm going to just keep raising the bar.'

One of McBride's steady collaborators throughout much of the 90s and the 2000s was the legendary Police vocalist/bassist Sting. The duo's beautiful rendition of 'Consider Me Gone' is a definite fan favourite on Conversations, demonstrating the playful, symbiotic relationship that the two bassists share. "Sting is so much more than a bass player. He's a full-blown musician in all areas – as a songwriter, a singer and an arranger," says McBride. "It's hard to think of him simply as a bassist. People always ask what it's like to play bass at the same time with Sting, but that hardly comes up because he always says, 'I hired you to play bass so I don't have to play bass.' But when we do play bass together I watch him and listen to him, and sometimes I have to make sure to play in the holes in parts where he drops out. I definitely see our collaboration continuing strong in the future.'

McBride is also known for his virtuoso electric bass playing with the Philadelphia Experiment, George Duke and many other projects including his own solo albums. He added a new Fodera to his collection of Pensa and Atelier basses at the beginning of this year. While he favours the upright instrument, playing electric bass is a huge part of his musical existence. "It's more of a physical switch for me than a musical switch. I like to play a lot of fretless bass, which seems to be the natural gravitational pull coming from playing upright," explains McBride. "It's physical in the sense that I have to shrink my left hand and get my hand positioning straight. I love jumping back and forth from both, though. A lot of people don't realise that I play electric bass, too. The acoustic bass is 'mother earth' to me. But I love both worlds."

No matter what McBride's weapon of choice, he is known and praised endlessly for his prowess in soloing. Commanding the grit that gave Mingus his unique sound, the precision of Ray Brown and the creativity of Ron Carter, McBride has evolved his soloing into a craft that is all his own. "I've always approached soloing from a certain standpoint, where I want the bass to have a voice that extends beyond the instrument's typical voice," says McBride. "That's why I love Jaco's solos, because his ideas come from so many different places – the voice, the horn and piano. He transcends his bass into a mode of total expression and that's what I've always wanted to do. Bass is such a hard instrument to play with clarity. I feel like if I'm crazy enough to take a Freddie Hubbard approach on bass, maybe people will really hear everything I'm playing. And that's my main goal on bass – to articulate every note individually so it can be heard."

McBride is regarded nowadays, alongside Wynton Marsalis, as one of the most prominent ambassadors for jazz music today. Hosting his own podcasts and radio talk show and working with many organisations, McBride is intent on spreading the knowledge of jazz to our youth and continuing its rich history. "My generation was the last generation that got a good dose of the jazz legends, so it's our duty to take what we've learned from them and tell these stories and anecdotes, and pass them along to the next generation. Not so the young can be exactly like them, because the elders didn't want us to be like them, but so they can get a feeling for their roots and appreciate where their history comes from. Jazz is always about honouring the past, but not getting stuck in it. The elders were always moving forward and we have to do the same."

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Amps: Epiphani 502 & 902 Heads, Epiphani 1x15 & 4x10 Cabinets

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BASS BEYOND LIMITS

Mike Flynn meets Portico Quartet's Milo Fitzpatrick

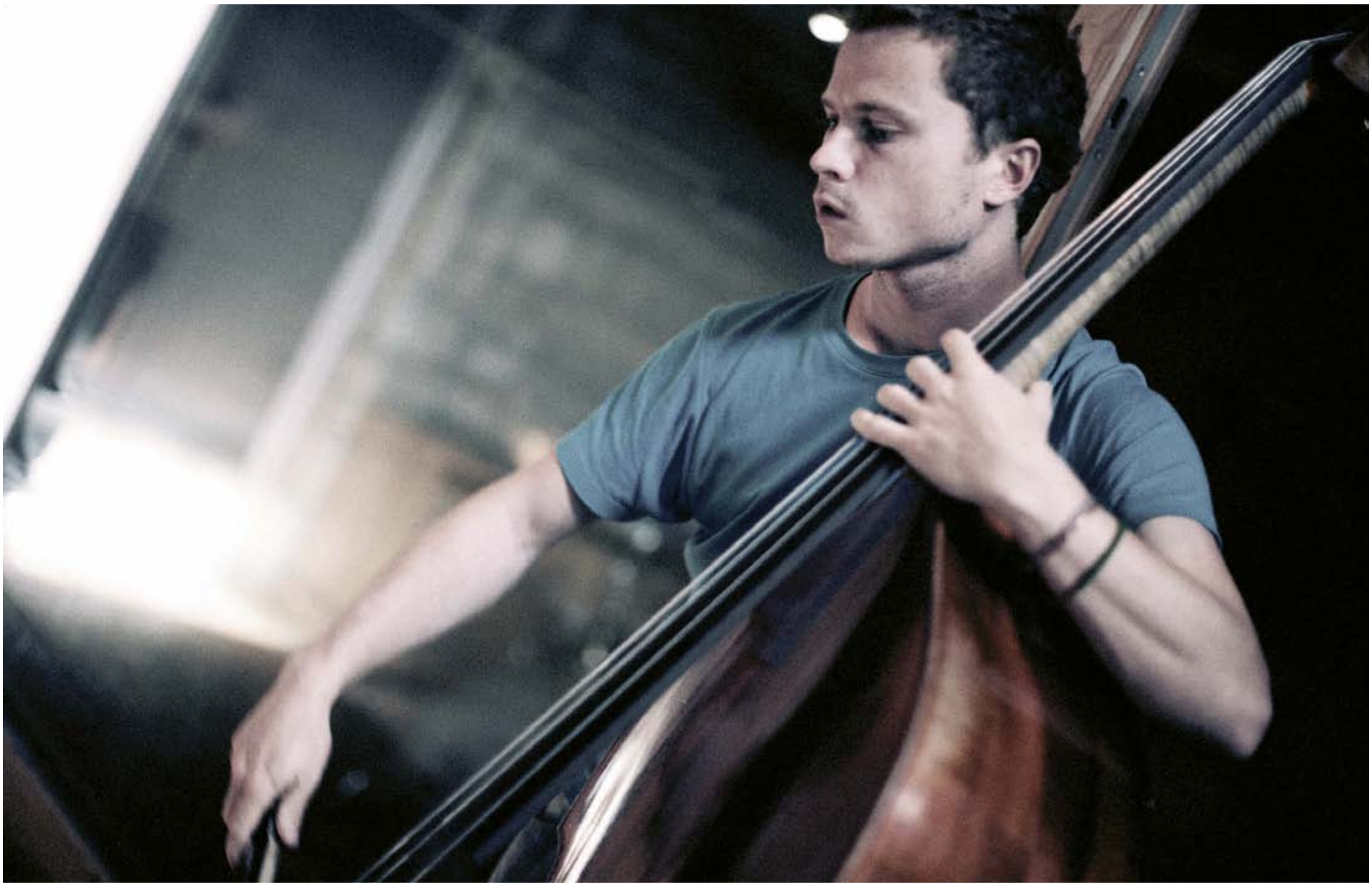
Portico Quartet are one of the most impressive bands to come from the UK in recent years, emerging with a Mercury Prize-nominated 2007 debut album, Knee Deep In The North Sea. Their unusual instrumentation – UFO-shaped Hang drums, saxophone, bass and drums – results in a combination of African music, jazz, rock and classical sounds. At the band's heart is bassist Milo Fitzpatrick, whose forceful and funky basslines power the music along with a canny blend of clever, counterpointed grooves and rich, bowed textures. Hovering between ambient jazz, post-dubstep, glitchy electronica and immersive filmic soundscapes, Portico's distinctive sound world remains very much their own.

Over a coffee in a central London café, we asked Milo what first drew him to the bass. "Right at the start," he says, "I used to play along with Police records, and I worked out that the bass was the crux of the music, and the home of the groove. Sting didn't necessarily play very flash basslines, but he had such a rich link between the movement of his music and his melody,

© Jamie Leith

BAND: **PORTICO QUARTET**
BASSIST: **MILO FITZPATRICK**

© Jamie Leith



© York Tilyer - Real World Productions

and I think that's what I got drawn to the most. I think that's a really good attribute in a bass player, if you can really link all the parts, and give it momentum. I used to nick my mum's CDs and play along on a crappy old acoustic guitar. I got the pushes straight away from 'Message In A Bottle,' or the reggae groove in 'Walking On The Moon' or just the simple rock thing in 'I Can't Stand Losing You.'"

Milo was soon listening to his brother's Red Hot Chili Peppers albums too, exposing him to Flea's frenetic funk style while he was still at school, where at lunchtimes he and his friends would sit around and learn the songs as best they could. He elaborates with a wry smile, "One day one of us got the tab for the whole of [RHCP's 1992 album] Blood Sugar Sex Magik and we set about learning all the main parts. We couldn't play them completely but it was some of the funnest music to jam around. Then from funk I got into jazz, and that led me to the double bass and Portico."

Predominantly an ear player, Milo first tackled the complexities of jazz by rote, only later going back and unpicking the theory and structure behind much of modern jazz. "I used to listen to Jaco Pastorius and players like that, and work out some of the grooves. There's a certain jazz colour and flavour to the way his patterns work with chords, and that led me into a world of more complex jazz harmony and feel. But learning by listening is a much richer experience than someone just putting a load of dots in front of you and saying 'This is 'Autumn Leaves,' get into this!' Er, what's 'Autumn Leaves'?"

It's a point that's pertinent to Portico Quartet, as from the moment they received a Mercury Prize nomination for their debut album, they've had to battle with notions that they are a jazz band. To be fair to their sound and all-encompassing approach to music-making, there's certainly a modicum of improvisation – but that sits alongside electronic and rock-edged flourishes in an immersive sound palette. In fact, not getting bogged down in stylistic semantics has benefited both the group's creativity and the experimentation that has fuelled their recent, self-titled album. Milo, like the rest of the band, has certainly been influenced by jazz, yet he feels it can also be a hindrance in some musicians' learning curves. "I think a lot of [music] students want to get into jazz because they see it as this step, they have to take this hurdle and have an understanding of it, which is fair enough," he explains. "But I think you have to really love the music; it has to get inside you, and then come from inside you, rather than the other way. That's when you can really start to play it and start to execute it well."

Portico Quartet are a close knit unit. Milo grew up with saxophonist Jack Wyllie – first meeting him aged five – and they shared a lot of musical experiences together over the years, ranging from rock bands with Jack on guitar, to prog and funk bands with Wyllie playing keys, flute and sax. "Jack's one of these multi-instrumentalist guys, which as a bass player is always fun because it always changes the dynamic. He set me up with this jazz orchestra in Southampton, with a really great tutor, and he really wanted me to play, but I was just so scared at first. I remember seeing the bass player who was there before, and he had amazing chops and I didn't even understand what was going on in the music! So I shadowed this other bass player for a while, and I was told to do what I do, which was to just groove through the music. It took me a while to realise that was really was the best way to approach it, to just go from what you feel and what you know and then try to find your own slant on it. I didn't think I was playing jazz music, but apparently I was!"

Portico's early busking days on London's South Bank, situated between the National Theatre and the Royal Festival Hall alongside the Thames, allowed them time to forge their unique sound and also to build a substantial fanbase, to whom they sold thousands of self-produced CDs.

An early indication of the impact of the strange UFO-shaped Hang percussion came when Nick Mulvey and Duncan Bellamy went and busked with the instruments and earned a respectable £70

© York Tilyer - Real World Productions

Milo Fitzpatrick at Abbey Road Studios

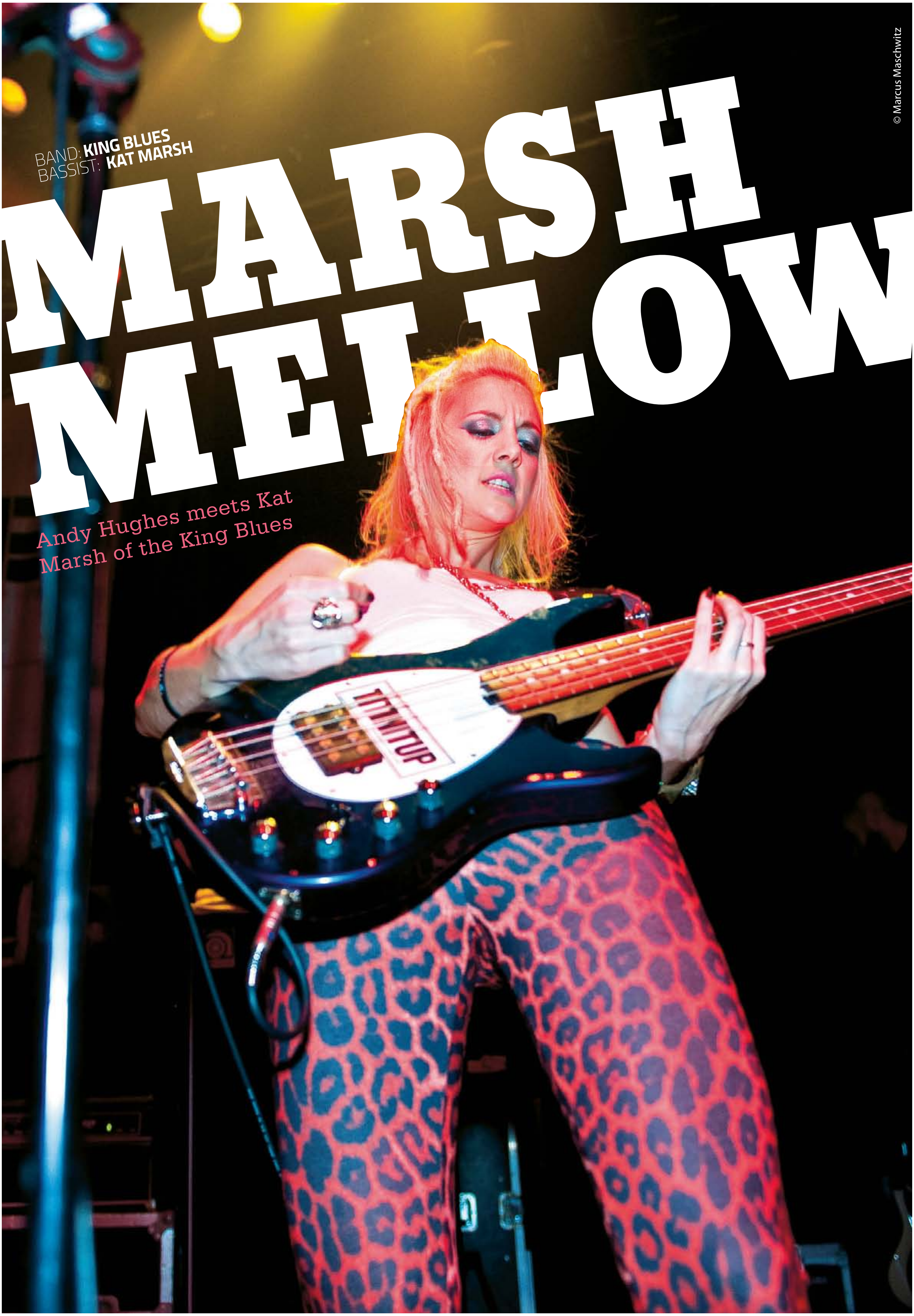
in two hours. Impressed, but not wishing to be outdone, Milo and Jack pitched up to play jazz standards on a freezing November night and came home with a measly £3.20. Joining forces seemed an obvious move, and it was when the four of them began playing together that an intriguing musical alchemy began to take place – albeit initially surrounded by uncertainty and no small amount of trepidation on Milo's part. As he explains: "This was initially how we formed the band: they just invited us down to jam with them on the street. That was the first time I saw the Hang and saw these two dudes sitting down playing [what looked like] woks, and I thought, 'What the hell am I doing here? I've never seen this instrument before – how am I supposed to play with that?' So when we started to play I began to put a couple of notes down, creeping my way into it, but then I thought 'This actually sounds really good and I don't actually have to play that much.' It was really freeing, because I get to dictate the chord structure and the harmony, and it gave me a lot of power to write sequences as we went along, it was down to Jack play something on top. That was how a lot of our early pieces were written. If you listen to any of the tracks on the album, the Hang percussion is playing something very cyclical in the middle, with the bass playing something simple underneath. To Jack's credit, he always comes up with a melody that's really haunting and strange, and that's what binds it all together."

Now veterans of several international tours, including acclaimed shows in New York and Paris, not to mention a headline performance at London's prestigious Barbican and two sold-out London Jazz Festival gigs last November, Portico have come a long way from their gritty street-level jams. Returning to the fray with a new studio album this January, their new electronica-laden sound fundamentally shifts them out of a predominantly acoustic setting into a new universe of live loops, effects and samples. They'd already begun to utilise these elements on a recent tour, but with original Hang player Nick Mulvey leaving the band to pursue a solo career as a singer-songwriter, the absence of the all-encompassing Hang forced Milo, Duncan and Jack to expand the sonic possibilities of their instruments. Now joined by keyboardist and Hang player Kier Vine as their new permanent fourth member, Portico are back on song, albeit one steeped in electronics.

For Milo, this has meant that he's been able to incorporate the bass guitar back into the mix, using it to play chords and upper register melodies, while still using the upright bass for bowed melodies or grooving bass-lines. "I'm playing bass," he says, "but because Duncan is using Hang samples pitched down a couple of octaves, it's like there's another bass player in the band, which in turn pushes you in to another world."

The contrasting approaches that the electric and double basses require has a profound effect on the music Milo makes with either instrument, he says. "You've got to have a lot of patience to play double bass, but it actually forces you to play a lot of very simple stuff, and really go back to the basics of your tone. That's what I really love about the double bass, you can play just one note and listen to the resonance, and it has a million different places it goes to before the note finishes. It's got this whole language before it's finished resonating. I think I got obsessed with that, because I used to play a lot of fancy stuff in funk bands and I drifted off into that virtuoso world. But when I tried the double bass, it put me back to what playing bass in an ensemble is all about. Just letting a bass guitar string ring is not quite what I want. I want something that has a lot more flavour to it, more dynamics, and texture in the sound. When I play a bottom G on the double bass and let it growl through the instrument, I can just do that for four bars – and it just sounds sweet, and that's OK."

Portico Quartet is out now on Real World. The band play the WOMAD festival on 28 July.
Info: www.porticoquartet.com



BAND: **KING BLUES**
BASSIST: **KAT MARSH**

MARSH MELLOW

Andy Hughes meets Kat Marsh of the King Blues

© Marcus Maschwitz

Not since the 1970s, when R&B kings Dr. Feelgood ruled the school, has a bass player needed to move out of the way of a whirling wide-eyed guitarist with the skill and speed required by Kat Marsh, who handles the bottom end of The King Blues' ska-punk agitpop. In moves reminiscent of John B. Sparks, Kat steps smartly back towards her amp as Jamie Jazz gallops backwards at speed, neither of them missing a note or a beat, as the band powers on through its typically incendiary live performance. With such nimble footwork as part of her onstage performance, it's little wonder that Kat has shed her high-heeled daywear boots for a pair of more functionally appropriate bumpers.

An hour or two before the gig, Kat sat backstage at Keele University discussing her introduction to the musical love of her life, her Fender Jaguar bass. "I started playing guitar when I was 16," Kat begins, her soft voice at odds with the visual volume of her riotously-coloured dance trousers. "When I went to university, I started a band with a friend and she was a really good bass player. She had a five-string Fender Jazz, and we started to swap instruments, and when I started to play bass I decided that I really loved it. I can play guitar, but bass is the instrument for me.

She adds: "My first bass was an Ibanez, it cost about £200 and it was ideal because it had a small body and a narrow neck, so it was easy for me to play. Every instrument that I have learned, I've taught myself to play by ear, but over the last 12 months I've started to have bass lessons. When this became my full-time job, I decided to get some proper grounding in the playing of the bass, and it's really helped a lot."

Straight away we're into the 'self-taught versus lessons' debate that most musicians have considered if they've made it to a professional level of competence with their chosen instrument. Self-taught players advise that instinct and freedom of thought are the best way forward, while teacher-trained players believe that avoiding bad technical habits makes for an easier life when the complicated stuff starts.

Kat is a firm believer in the benefits of a good teacher: "My teacher was amazing and he taught me loads of ways to play better. When I was doing something wrong, he showed me the right way, and I used that way from then on. I wasn't using one finger per fret, and I wasn't very economical with my playing technique. He taught me that I had to get the little finger on my fretting hand up to strength, and using that extra finger has made a huge difference. If you teach yourself, it's easy to avoid using that little finger because it's natural to leave that alone. Since I've had proper lessons, my playing has become much more centred, and I'm finding riffs a lot easier to deal with now."

Time to talk about Kat's Fender Jaguar, which is as near to the perfect bass as she has found. "I used to work in a guitar shop, so I tried out loads before I settled on the Jaguar. I love the look of it as well. I think you have to love the shape of any instrument, because you have to love looking at it and picking it up every day. Dean, the guitarist in King Blues, has a Music Man which I've been playing on this tour for the first time. That is a lovely bass to play, so I'm between the two as to which is my favourite. The Music Man has a really sweet tone, but the Fender Jag has a bit more heaviness to it, which means a lot in a band like this one. We have such a variety of sounds in our set, from punk to ska to reggae tunes, so the bass is far more integral to the overall sound than it would be in some bands.

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"I've also been trying different playing styles to get the sounds I want. I've always been a finger player – that's how I started – and until joining The King Blues I'd never played with a pick. I realised that I wanted to get a hard attacking sound to back the punk songs we do, so I practised every day with a pick, and I listened to bands like Rancid and Sick Of It All, and got into that vibe and that way of playing.

Now I have two different settings on my strap: low-slung for the punk stuff, because I can keep my arm straight and really dig in with the pick, and then for the dub stuff, I have a higher setting so the bass is high on my body and I can get to it with my fingers easily for the more complicated lines. It did feel strange at first, but when you learn to play with a band, you put in the hours of rehearsal on your own, and then we rehearsed for weeks as a band before we did our first live gig, so by the time I came to go out on stage, I had done the two styles so many times and I had it all down comfortably. I'm still learning to play with a pick, but I'm more comfortable with it now."

We get onto what Kat runs her Fender bass through: "The band use Ampeg and I have an SVT Classic Head and an 8x10" cab. I've got a Sansamp Bass Driver as well, which I promised myself I'd get when I joined the band. I like a nice, clean tone with plenty of power in the bottom end, but nice and bright as well, and the Sansamp delivers that."

Joining an existing line-up can have its complications, as any newbie will agree. It's like living with a new family, getting to grips with the personalities and relationships involved, and more importantly, learning how to get your ideas for arrangements across, without crossing anyone's musical demarcation lines. Happily for Kat, The King Blues is very much an open house when it comes to putting ideas in at the writing and rehearsal stage.

"We all get together in our rehearsal room and jam, and Itch [Johnny 'Itch' Fox, vocalist] will bring a song, or an idea for a song structure, and we all jam it out and see what works. Everyone will suggest ideas for drums, guitar, bass, vocals, and we work out what fits, and create the finished song from there. Since I joined the band I've listened to a lot more punk and reggae, because they are the major influences in the band's sound. I'd heard those styles, but I'd never listened closely and got into them properly. I think it helps me to understand the music that Itch and Jamie have grown up with, and also they appreciate that I bring something different based on the styles that have influenced me."

Kat's ideal bass would be as follows: "I like a thin neck, because I have quite small hands, but I also like really thick strings as well, so the two probably don't go too well together. I've worked my way up from fairly thin strings when I started playing, and now I'm on 55s which give me a nice full sound. I'd like a quick-release strap so I can shift the position of the bass on my body from low-slung for the punky stuff to high up for the dub and funky parts, that's pretty specific for me, I guess! I love the passive/active settings on the Jaguar, which you can switch really easily, and the series/parallel changes on the pick-ups. I tend to use the series setting because I like the full sound. I think the Jaguar is my ideal bass."

What about five or six-string, or fretless? "My bass teacher has a six-string fretless, and I've had a go, but I just feel a bit overwhelmed with it all. I think if that low end on a five-string suits your sound, then go for it, but for me, I think four is the magic number. I have tried a fretless and I could get into it, and maybe I will one day. I love the flowing sound they have, that gentle swoop you can do. I love double basses as well, but you need a lot of strength to play them properly."

Who would be Kat's dream jam band? "It would be Rage Against The Machine," she responds without a moment's hesitation. "Timmy C [Commerford] is one of my biggest influences as a player, and they have that angry attitude that is in The King Blues as well. It's about singing with a purpose. It was that attitude that I saw in their music which made me think I could really enjoy being in this band. It's important to me that a band has a reason to do what they do, and Rage has it, and The King Blues has it as well."

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Bristol based punk jazz crew Get The Blessing exploded onto the music scene four years ago with their barbed blend of wiry distorted bass lines, snapping drums and pugnacious sax/trumpet attack. Mike Flynn spoke to their bassist and bandleader Jim Barr to find out more

Jazz Fuzz Fury

Flying in the face of convention, Get The Blessing's ultra-raw sound hangs on the bold bass work of Jim Barr, perhaps best known for his key role in iconic trip-hop band Portishead. But with the release of GTB's filmic new album, OCDC, earlier this year, they've been winning wider acclaim as a serious jazz-edged band that are taking their music and unconventional sound to even higher levels of excitement.

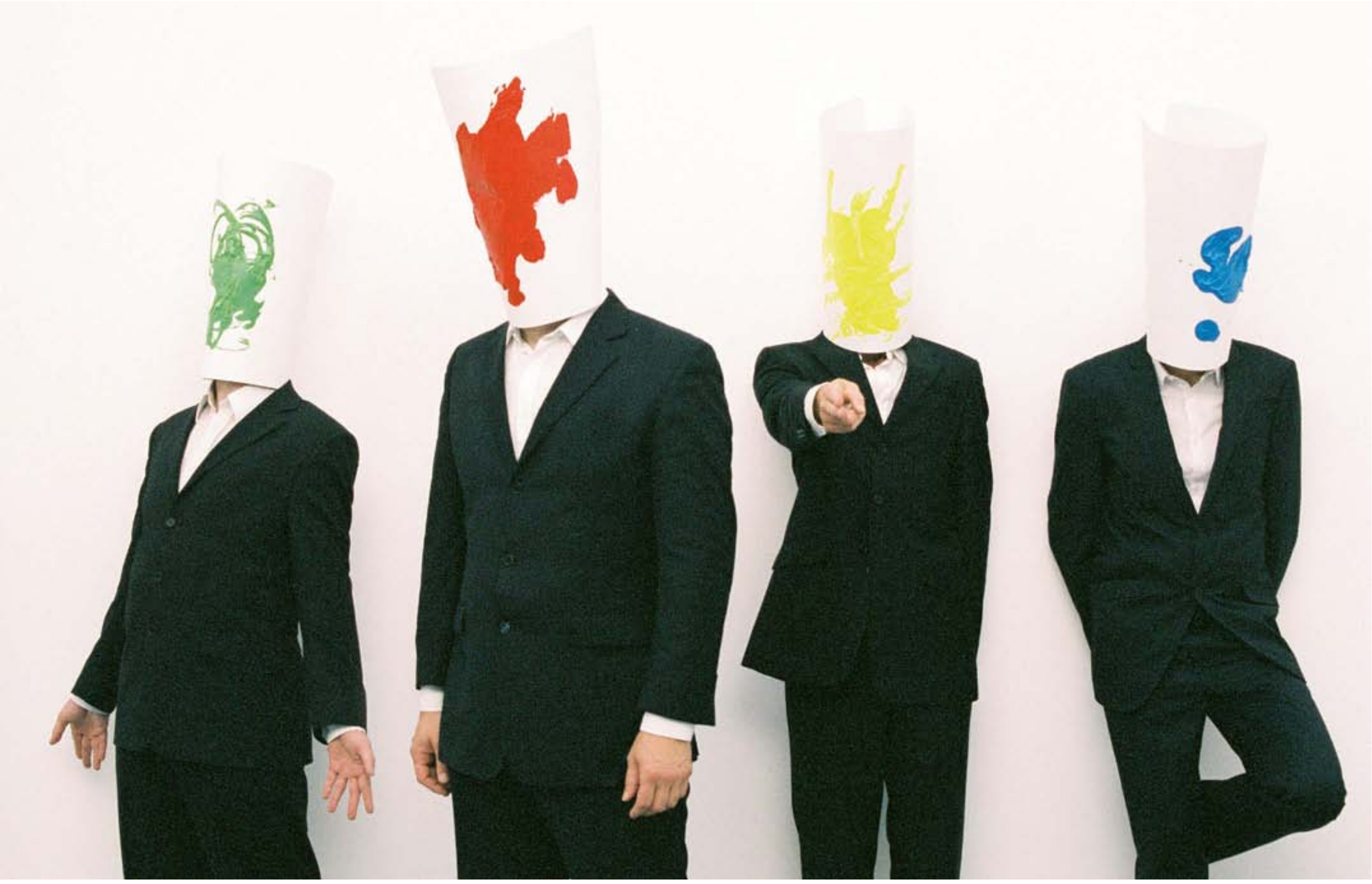
After two breakneck sets – the debut album All Is Yes, and the equally feisty follow-up Bugs In Amber, this third outing feels far more languid and developed. Was there a conscious effort to produce a deeper listening experience this time around? "Yes", says Jim down the phone from his home in Bristol, "but I think mostly we just wanted to do something that was more… mature is a terrible word, but just a bit deeper than what we had done before – because on the first album we didn't really think about it at all. We were just enjoying playing and we just wrote the tunes as an excuse for something to play. And the second album was like 'Oh shit, we'd better do a second album' and so the third album was like, 'What do we really want to do now?' so we spent a lot more time writing the tunes rather than just going, oh, we can play that really loud, and we can play that really quietly then make a jolly old racket. We thought more carefully about what kind of tunes we were going to play, so the recording process was actually a bit of a pain in the arse. We'd do some recording and then we'd go on tour for a bit and come back and go 'Oh that recording's rubbish, we play that much better now.' So we'd record it again, go on tour again and come back and say, 'That's still not good enough because we're playing it better now.'"

Barr laughs at this paradoxical situation. "We had developed so much on the road that it took us three or four goes to actually say that's enough, that's it now. That was a luxury we didn't allow ourselves, or didn't have time to, before that. The second album was like, 'Get it done quick' and the first one was like 'Oh, have we made a record?' and we were really surprised someone wanted to put it out. It was a record made by mistake, really!"

All Is Yes went on to win Best Jazz Album at the 2008 BBC Jazz Awards, when the BBC still held this prestigious, but now defunct, annual event. However, OCDC is a far weightier record and one that unwinds and reveals more and more melodic and textural detail with repeated listens. Jim explains this is also thanks to the longer gestation period in the writing process. GTB write collectively, as Jim says: "It all goes into the pot and then things get mashed around until everyone is happy".

OCDC features three tunes each from Barr, saxophonist Jake McMurchie and trumpeter Pete Judge, with drummer Clive Deamer contributing to the last, brass-laden track, 'Pentopia.' Yet it's Jim's snarling, often slightly distorted, bass that is the central plank of the GTB sound. With no harmony instrument and his own artfully brutal lines cutting through the heart of each tune, how does operating in such open terrain affect his sound and approach? "The bass has to fill up a lot of space to make it work," Jim explains, "but the freedom of it is that you have to keep it all going and do something harmonically, rather than just making a satisfyingly bass-y groove. It requires more than that. And it's great to play with Clive, because the way he plays it's just so easy to make something to get excited about."

In their rawer moments, Get The Blessing have a similar rasping attack to that of the great Boston bass/sax/drums trio Morphine, which prominently featured the late, great bassist Mark Sandman's two-string bass, tuned to a fifth and played with a bottleneck slide. Jim agrees that such



a stripped-back approach has its benefits in GTB too. "I think limitation is a kind of liberation," he says, "because you've got less to think about and you kind of get on with it. In fact playing with two strings reminds me of a story about a bass player who turned up in a studio and he had two strings on his bass, but they were both E strings. The producer said, 'What's with the two E strings?,' and the bassist said, 'Oh, in case one of them snaps,' which is absolutely brilliant. If you can narrow it down to that, it's great."

Barr's sonic presence both live and on record is a sizeable one, but for all the edge and grit in his tone, there's subtle flexibility as well. What's even more unconventional for a jazz-orientated band is that he uses a plectrum to cut through the mix with bold uncompromising lines. He's not alone in this approach: Led Bib's Liran Donin and Acoustic Ladyland's Ruth Goller are both fellow pick-wielding jazzers. However, Jim's metallic tone and note choices really define his sound. He explains that its evolution wasn't merely the start of a new style of playing for him: it was actually the genesis of the band itself.

"It was a conscious move in a way," he says, "but it all started with one particular tune. I've always been a big Jean-Jacques Burnel fan and The Stranglers were one of my favourite bands when I was a horrible little teenager. And I got into Jaco Pastorius the same as any other bass player, who wants to play the bass more than as just a comping thing, you know? I love Jaco and I love to play that fingerstyle thing too, with that nice honky sound. But we had written a tune where it seemed that what it needed was a real dirty, pick bass. I hadn't done that before with this band, and then everyone just went 'Ooh! What was that? That was something different – that sounds like us – that doesn't sound like anyone else.' So that's how the first album started to evolve – just from that one tune called 'Bleach Cake' which has this big nasty bass sound. Playing it on a double bass or with a big honky Pastorius sound would just be completely wrong, and then it just went from there. It's evolved since then, and I've been surprised by how dynamically you can play with a pick – with a slightly dirty sound it's a completely different dynamic to playing with fingers. Before this, I thought you just rattled it out when you played with a pick, but once you get into it there's a lot more expression than you would expect, especially once you get into drive pedals and amps."

Jim's quick to point out that he's merely following in the footsteps of the mighty distortion bass work of Colin Hodgkinson and his hugely influential Back Door trio – and perhaps more pertinently, the pioneering fuzz bass of Soft Machine's late bass maestro Hugh Hopper. He explains, "Someone gave me a whole stack of Hugh Hopper records recently, and they're like a dictionary of dirty bass! Like a colour chart, it's all there."

Jim's musical outlets include his own Bristol-based recording studio, plus sessions and side projects with many other artists, but his most high-profile project yet has been playing bass with legendary Portishead. Having produced one of the epoch-defining albums of the 1990s, the Mercury Prize-winning Dummy, Barr and drummer Deamer continue to work on and off with the band as and when album and touring commitments arise.

Has this long-standing association affected his writing and playing style? "It's been a real pleasure working with them, but it's also been a really special thing to learn from the way they make music, which is quite singular and not like the way anyone else does it," he says. "So to be inside that has been quite an honour, and I have to admit that it's been an influence on my own music. Not necessarily on Get The Blessing, but on other things I do, because I do quite a lot of production work. I like that single minded, two-fingers-to-the-establishment way of making music. Anti-establishment things are always good." It would seem that the tightly controlled ethos of Portishead was also the catalyst for the exploratory nature of Get The Blessing, as Barr elaborates: "It's not like anything else where you can interpret or chuck your own little bits in there. It's absolutely stripped to the bone and it has to be that way; those notes have to have that sound and that intensity, and I've really appreciated the value of playing in that extremely held-back and restrained way."

OCDC is out now on Naim.
www.theblessing.co.uk

Roya
5-String Bass

Is it a bass? Is it a work of art? And does it justify its four-grand price tag…? Kevin Sanders delivers the verdict

German bass-maker Jens Ritter is no shrinking violet: his brochure describes him as 'The German Stradivarius!' and goes on to claim, 'He transcended the guitar to a new level of being.'… I think I know what they mean. What's more, he holds the record for having made the world's most expensive bass guitar. In 2006, he produced the 'Ritter Royal Flora Aurum,' a five-string in quilted maple, bedecked with platinum, gold, diamonds and for the nut, using 10,000-year-old mammoth ivory. The bass was put on sale at Wynn & Co. jewellers in Las Vegas for the equivalent of over £150,000. (Gig bag included. Probably…)

At his rural workshop in Deidesheim, Germany, Ritter makes basses that blur the distinction between instrument and art. But these aren't just for collectors and galleries: they're instruments for players, too. The Roya may look like a collaboration between Dali and Pollock, but let's see how it plays.

Build Quality

The front of the Roya, which makes up about a third of the body's thickness, is poplar, a light and transparent-sounding wood that is seldom used these days, but was once common as a tone wood in the famous German instrument-making area of Mittenwald. This particular piece has a burr grain, and if only polished or lacquered would look stunning, but here it's been flecked and splashed with a rich stain. The effect is mesmerising, giving the body and headstock a mineral-like, almost three-dimensional effect.

The back is figured maple and again, the finish is amazing. Stained to show off the grain to its best, it has then been rubbed back in certain areas to give it a worn, distressed look, like old farmhouse furniture or a pair of faded jeans.

The three-piece figured maple neck, coloured to match the back, certainly isn't going to fall off, held on as it is by no fewer than 10 bolts. Is this really necessary? Well, Ritter's website states that this improves tone, explaining: "The reason is a lower absorption of the string amplitude energy, because the absorption area (vibrations-system) is divided into two 'oscillation-arms' with different lengths, which hardly move with the string frequency." Hmm... now, I'm no Brian Cox, but I think what they mean is that it helps sustain.

The fretboard on this bass is one of the most perfect pieces of ebony I have ever seen: jet-black, and with a fine, straight grain, it's smoothed almost to a shine. As you'd expect with a bass at this level, the 24 frets are perfectly cut and fitted, as are the white pearl block inlays.

Jens Ritter designs and develops nearly every aspect of his basses, and the hardware is no exception. The two big 'triplebucker' pickups are designed in-house and covered in ebony to match the fretboard. They're set (somewhat unnervingly) slightly off square, the neck pickup to a greater degree than the bridge unit. Talking of the bridge, this is a two-piece design, a bit like the Warwick system, but with neat, individual saddles and string anchors all beautifully engineered and finished. The

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RITTER ROYA 5-STRING BASS
PRICE £4838

Body: Maple
Top: Poplar burl
Neck: Three-piece maple, bolt-on
Fingerboard: Ebony with white pearl block inlays
Scale: 35" (889mm)
Frets: 24
Finish: Various
Tuners: Ritter/Gotoh
Bridge: Ritter 3D with B1 string anchors
Pickups: 2 x Ritter Triplebucker
Hardware: Chrome
Controls: Master volume (push/pull active/passive), pickup balance, tone blend, 2 x stacked tone, coil tap for each pickup, output jack
Weight: 4.0kg (8.8lbs)

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Amazing looks, exclusivity and above all, a great-sounding bass.
Minus: Controls take a bit of practice to master - looks not for everyone.
Overall: Love or loathe its shape and finish, there's no denying that this is a stunning bass. I would suggest you start saving. After all, if Jens Ritter really is the German Stradivarius, in 300 years' time you'll be kicking yourself for not buying one now.

CONTACT DETAILS

Bass Gear Ltd.
Unit 2, Twyford Business Park,
Gas Lane,
Twyford,
Reading,
Berkshire RG10 9TU
Tel: 01189 706925
www.ritter-instruments.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY	5
SOUND QUALITY	4.5
VALUE FOR MONEY	3.5

Plug in, and it's soon apparent that the Ritter's sound is a match for its classy build quality.

bone nut is also worthy of mention, as it's beautifully cut, shaped and polished. The machine heads are made especially for Ritter by Gotoh, with chunky, heart shaped tuning buttons.

The large back plate is held on with just three countersunk hex screws and, once removed, reveals a neat copper foil-shielded cavity with many of the components sealed into a moulded plastic housing, leaving just the perfectly soldered pots on view. The two 9V batteries that power the actives are housed in a separate black plastic flip-up holder, set flush into the upper side of the back.

Sounds And Playability

Strap this bass on, and it immediately feels light and comfortable. It balances well, and the shallow neck and wide string spacing means that it plays comfortably, too. Whatever the science is behind the 'two-oscillating-arm' doo-dah, it works. Even acoustically, this bass has an almost supernatural sustain, almost as if there were a hidden compressor working quietly away in there somewhere.

Plug in, and it's soon apparent that the Ritter's sound is a match for its classy build quality. With all the controls flat, the sound is huge, with a distinctly solid and muscular tone that oozes quality. Time to check out the controls, and firstly, pulling out the volume pot puts the bass into passive mode. I'm a big fan of passive circuits, and the combination of timbers and the construction of this bass really suits this mode. The tone-blend control enables you to quickly dial in a sound that's both clear and focused, with just a hint of creamy, retro warmth.

Going back to the active mode means access to the two, stacked tone controls. The forward unit offers high cut and boost on top, with high mid on the lower ring, and the back control supplies bass on top and low mid below. These are powerful EQs and need to be used carefully, which is not easy given the somewhat cramped positioning of the controls and switches.

Using the pickup pan to slightly bias the bridge pickup, while adding a little upper mid and changing the coil switches from 'humbucker' to 'single coil,' gives you a great Jazz-style solo

tone, with bite and attack at the top end supported by that seemingly endless sustain. You need to have a good technique and play cleanly, though – this bass is unforgiving of sloppy muting.

Conclusion

Those familiar with Jens Ritter's work will know that as far as his designs go, the Roya is fairly traditional. It's a handsome instrument and, while there's something of the Carl Thompson about the look of that upper horn, this is an original and striking design which you'll either love or loathe – and let's face it, cost aside, if you can't get past those looks, then this probably isn't the bass for you.

For me, the jury's still out on the current trend for making on-board preamps and EQ as complex as this. In my experience, during a live performance you really need to be able to switch between just two or three of your working tones quickly and easily, and with three switches and five pots, the lower two of which are stacked, this takes a little practice and concentration. Of course, the upside is that the range of tones and permutations on this bass are virtually limitless, and it's a mark of the overall quality of this instrument to say that no matter what you do with the controls, the quality of the sound is always rich and usable.

Expensive? Of course. But if you have deep pockets, and striking and unusual looks are high on your list of priorities, then at least you can be assured that with the Ritter, you'll also be getting a great-sounding instrument.

> Strap this bass on, and it immediately feels light and comfortable. It balances well, and the shallow neck and wide string spacing means that it plays comfortably, too.

Marleaux Votan

Deluxe 5-String Bass

Germany has produced more than its fair share of top bass-makers: Ritter, Sandberg, Schack and, of course, Warwick, all make quality instruments for the discerning low-ender. As do Marleaux. Kev Sanders asks if their new five-string Votan Deluxe stacks up against the competition…

Build Quality

It doesn't take long to realise that the workmanship of the Votan is first rate. There's an assured confidence to the way in which the whole instrument is made and, although it's a shape that's immediately familiar, subtle differences in the outline of the lower horn, heel and headstock make it both visually pleasing and very comfortable to play. The body is made from dibetou, an African hardwood that's not often seen in bass making, despite the fact that its tonal properties, density and grain makes it ideal. Here, it's stained a dark indigo, almost black on the edges and fading into the front where the slight lightening in colour shows off the figuring of the figured ash top to its best.

The bolt-on neck is secured with six screws, set into individual ferrules, and accurately fitted to the body. The rigidity of this join means that the heel can be angled across the width of the neck, giving slightly better access to the top frets than would normally be possible. The neck and fretboard are made from a pale birdseye maple, and set into the front are large oval white pearl markers, each with a smaller oval of maple within. Someone commented that they look like fried eggs, and of course once that is said, it's very hard to see them any other way! At the end of the fretboard is a bone nut, whose primary job, given the zero fret fitted, is to space the strings and prevent any lateral movement. The headstock silhouette reminds me of the Stingray, but here the tuners are arranged in a 'three and two' configuration.

The pickups mirror the large white oval position markers on the neck. To my eyes, these slightly dominate the looks of the bass, detracting from that tasty figured front, and personally I'd prefer them with black covers. They're Delano pickups: similar to the Xtender 5s, but made specifically for Marleaux. The rest of the hardware on the Votan is of a similarly high quality, with a chrome ETS bridge, Schaller tuners and Marleaux's own preamp. This takes a little getting used to, but once mastered offers a wide palette of sounds that should cover any bass gig.

Sounds And Playability

To start with, the bass needed a little fine-fettling: we raised the action a little and set the intonation, but all the tools to do this are supplied with the bass and after just a couple of minutes we were ready to put the Votan though its paces.

With the volume pushed down and the bass in passive mode, you get a real sense of the natural voice of the instrument. Whatever your thoughts on the aesthetics of those pickups, they have an amazing ability to respond to the way in which you play. Play softly, perhaps as you would for a ballad or quiet solo passage, and they sound sweet and clear, much like a good vintage Jazz, but play hard and the sound and response, even in this passive mode, changes – becoming bigger, angrier and with a bass-heavy snarl and bark that increases as you move your picking hand back toward the bridge. The two three-position mini toggle switches allow each pickup to be used in single coil, parallel humbucker or series humbucker mode. However they're set, they have a very flat frequency response, with the wide transients of the low

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

MARLEAUX VOTAN DELUXE 5-STRING
PRICE: £2995
(including hard-shell case and Schaller strap locks)

Body: Dibetou
Top: Ash burl
Neck: Birdseye maple – six-way bolt-on
Fingerboard: Birdseye maple with white pearl inlays
Scale: 34"/864mm
Frets: 22
Finish: 'Blue jeans' High Gloss
Tuners: Schaller M4
Bridge: ETS
Pickups: 2 x custom made Delano Xtender 5s
Hardware: Chrome
Controls: Master volume (push/pull passive/active), pickup balance, tone blend, 2 x stacked tone, 2 x three-way single coil/parallel/series for each pickup, output jack

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Cool looks, quality timbers, hand-made exclusivity and a great sounding rock bass.
Minus: Controls a little confusing to start with. White pickups overpower the otherwise classy looks.
Overall: If you're in the market for a top-end bass, check out the Marleaux. There's lots of choice at this price, but the Votan may well tick all the right boxes for you.

CONTACT DETAILS

www.marleaux-bass.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE FOR MONEY

B string reproduced just as accurately as the high end. To my ears, these pickups sound best in single coil mode, and panned slightly to favour the neck pickup, but playing around with the controls, it's possible to find virtually any sound you could want.

Pulling out the volume enables us to use the dual concentric bass and treble controls. Again, the nature of the bass changes, and it's in active mode, turned up loud and proud, that the bass seems to make most sense. To me, rocking out is what the Marleaux does best and this is compounded by the generous, C-profile neck. It's quite chunky for a five-string: not uncomfortably so, but similar I would say to an earlier Spector. Plugging in to a big rig seems to bring out the best in this instrument and panned to the neck pickup and played hard with a pick, you'd be hard pressed to find a better rock'n'roll bass.

Conclusion

Marleaux have come from nowhere to being one of the most talked about names in bass. This isn't just all down to good marketing. The Marleaux Votan is a fine instrument, but it's up against some very stiff competition, all competing for the musician's buck. For nearly three grand, the bassist is spoilt for choice, with instruments like Musicman's Stringray and Sterling 5, Fender's Jazz V and the Sadowsky MV5 all offering top quality for less cash – and that's just the big boys. Arguably, 'mainstream' basses like these offer a bit more versatility, but you should remember that unlike much of the competition, Marleaux basses are handmade – and that brings with it an exclusivity that's not easy to find elsewhere, even at this price.

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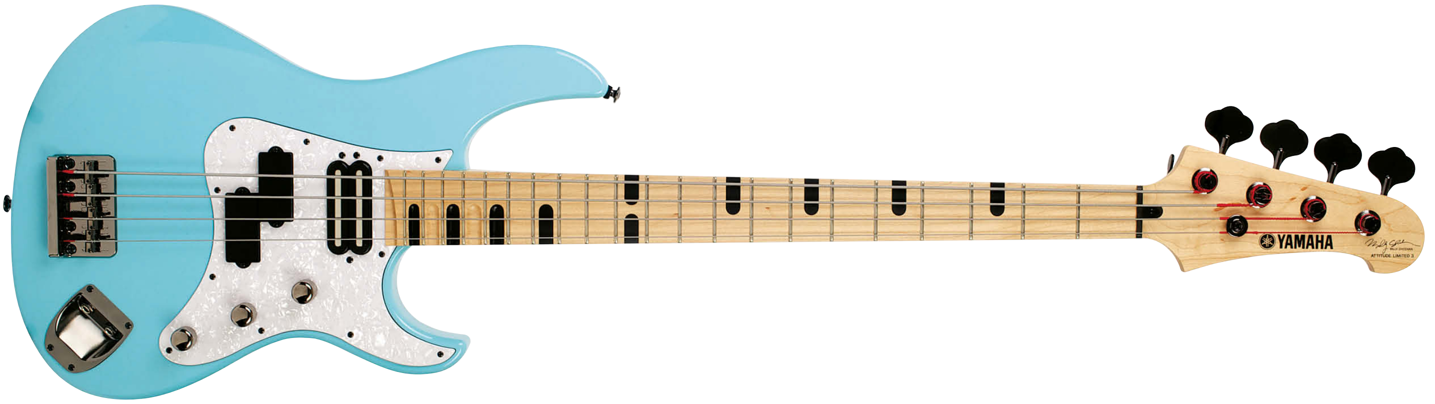

Yamaha

Attitude III Bass

Billy Sheehan is one of the world's best bass players. It follows, then, that he'd need one of the world's niftiest basses. Stuart Clayton puts the Yamaha Attitude III on trial

The Attitude III is the first update to Billy Sheehan's signature model in 17 years and was released in 2011 to celebrate the 21st anniversary of the instrument. Boasting many refinements such as a newly designed neck position pickup and an improved neck-to-body join, the Attitude III is Billy's current weapon of choice, whether recording or touring. Retailing at a hefty £2498, it's no casual purchase, but this is an instrument that delivers a lot of bang for your buck.

With over 4000 gigs under his belt, Billy has come to know exactly what he requires from his instruments. During his formative years playing in Buffalo, New York, Sheehan built a 'Frankenstein' instrument comprising a Precision body paired with a Telecaster neck, to which he then added a Gibson EB-0 pickup in neck position, seeking to incorporate the tone he heard from bassists such as Paul McCartney and Paul Samwell-Smith. Lacking the experience to wire the pickups together, Sheehan wired each to a separate output, enabling him to amplify each pickup separately. This modification, along with others such as fret scalloping, became a key part of Sheehan's instruments, and enabled him to perfect the mind-blowing bass skills that eventually landed him the job of bassist in David Lee Roth's band during the eighties. Billy's association with Yamaha also began in that decade, with an early signature model based on the company's BB series. This developed into the original Attitude bass, which Billy first began using in 1990. Built to incorporate all of the features from his old Frankenstein bass (which Billy affectionately nick-named 'The Wife'), the Attitude has been Billy's trusty companion for over two decades.

Build Quality

Like its previous incarnations, the Attitude III is based on a Precision body and a Telecaster neck, with the addition of all of the various modifications that Sheehan made to his original workhorse – the scalloped frets, separately wired pickups, an EB-0 pickup in neck position, a Hipshot D-tuner and an improved neck to body join. This latter feature has been radically updated on this instrument. Where the Attitude II had only two bolts visible on the rear of the instrument (two further bolts were found under the scratch plate), the Attitude III has five visible bolts, two of which are screwed into the body at a 45-degree angle. According to Billy, this pulls the end grain of the respective body and neck woods together, making for a stronger and tighter fit, and therefore enabling him to indulge in some serious neck bending.

The Attitude III also features a new, specifically designed pickup. This replaces the DiMarzio humbucker that was in neck position on the previous Attitude models, although its function remains the same here. Further refinements to the instrument include shaping at the end of the neck to better accommodate slap playing, a slimmer truss rod, a countersunk bridge, and the use of artificially aged wood. The ageing process used for the wood on these basses is similar to that which Yamaha use in their piano construction, and purportedly improves the tone and sustain of the instrument.

The build quality was excellent across the instrument: the body work was perfect, as was the fretwork. Overall the bass was a dream to play, although it's a little on the chunky side. The neck was quick and responsive and very

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

YAMAHA ATTITUDE III BASS PRICE £2,498

Made in: Japan
Scale length: 34" (863.6mm)
Fingerboard: Maple
Radius: 10" (250mm)
Frets: 21
Body: Alder, spline joint
Neck: Maple
Bridge: Solid brass
Pickups: Yamaha Custom Woofer Pickup (front), DiMarzio WillPower (middle)
Controls: Front Volume, Front Tone, Rear Volume, Woofer Hi Cut Switch
Hardware: Yamaha black, Hipshot D-Tuner
Weight: 12kg
Case\Gig Bag: Hard case
Colours: Black and Sonic Blue
Left Hand Model: No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: A highly playable instrument with a broad tonal palette that includes Billy's signature tones.
Minus: The control set requires some experimentation – and might make you go and buy another amp just so you can run it in stereo mode!
Overall: A great update of an already excellent bass, but it will be out of reach for many players

CONTACT DETAILS

Yamaha: uk.yamaha.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆

easy to get around. The overall balance of the instrument was excellent when standing, and a little neck-heavy when seated, although that's to be expected with the large headstock mass.

Sounds

Sonically, the Attitude III was everything we were expecting. Although Billy Sheehan uses his bass in stereo mode – with each pickup signal being sent to a separate amplifier – those without the facility to do so will be pleased to hear that it works just as well in mono. Plugging into the second of the two inputs initially uses only the P-bass pickup, with only the volume control for this pickup being active in this mode. However, by pulling the centre control outwards, both pickups are routed to the same output, the result being the classic Sheehan tone, which is unmistakably that of a souped-up P-bass. I found this tone catered for rock perfectly and loved how it sounded when used live. The low-end grunt of the neck position pickup works perfectly with the upper mids supplied by the DiMarzio WillPower P-bass pickup, resulting in a tone that simultaneously rounds out the low-end, while remaining noticeable in the mix.

Plugging into the other output allows the user to use the neck position pickup only – the result here is the full, well-rounded low-end that one would expect from a pickup based on the old Gibson EB-0 design. In this mode, only the volume and tone controls for this pickup are enabled, as one would expect.

With the range of tones on offer, the Attitude III is undoubtedly a very versatile beast, but it's one that requires a certain amount of experimentation in order to get the best from it. While most users will probably use the instrument in mono mode, the optional stereo mode adds further scope for refining your tone. You might assume that the core audience for this instrument will be Sheehan fans, but in a way this does the instrument a disservice. It's a very versatile bass, and one that many professional bassists would find useful in a variety of situations.

Conclusion

It's probably obvious that we were impressed with the new Attitude. The build quality is top-notch, and the range of tones is very impressive, although it must be said that there is definitely a learning curve when it comes to getting the best from the instrument. It's a slick, highly playable instrument and it feels exactly how Billy wants it to feel – a solid, versatile workhorse that is built to withstand a hard life on the road. There will undoubtedly be a home for the Attitude III in the hands of many Sheehan fans worldwide, but as already stated, the instrument is versatile enough to deserve an even wider audience. Retailing for the best part of £2.5k, it's up against some pretty stiff competition in this price bracket (after all, you could have your custom instrument built for that kind of cash), but nevertheless if the opportunity presents itself, we'd highly recommend giving the Attitude a try.

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Cort Artisan

C4H/B4 Basses

Low to mid-budget basses? Bring 'em on! Sam Wise gets Cort in the act.

Cort have been around for a long time without really burning themselves into our collective imaginations with a particular signature instrument. This is perhaps not a surprise when you learn that the Cort factory produces far more instruments for other manufacturers than it does under its own brand. Ibanez, Squier and G&L all source guitars from Cort's Korean manufacturing base, and if it's good enough for them, it should be good enough for the rest of us.

The Artisans are positioned at the top end of Cort's bass range, but there's a large variation within the series as well. The B4, at a street price of around £700, considerably outranks the C4H, which can be snagged for as little as £300.

Body and Neck

The lower-priced C4H pays clear homage to the Jazz bass, but a combination of a lack of pickguard, a subtle radiusing of the top, and an unexpected 'mother of toilet seat' binding sets it apart from the classics with a more modern feel. Contouring at the rear is limited to a ribcage cutaway, and the mahogany body is protected by a pearlescent white finish which looks almost metallic silver from certain angles. The 34" scale bolt-on neck is in wenge, with a slimmish C-section to it, and a 24-fret rosewood fingerboard with asymmetric dot markers. Stylistically, it's a nice looking-bass which would look very much at home in early-80s-era Depeche Mode, and certainly stands out a bit from most of what you'll find in the shops. It's nicely put together and well finished, though there are clues to the price point here and there. The neck pocket in particular is not as well cut as it might be, and it's possible to slip a business card between the neck and body on the upper side.

The more expensive B4 is a very different proposition. Where the C4H's sharp corners make it look more slab-sided than it is, the B4's radiused edges make the whole bass look considerably smaller – although a comparison shows that the bodies are identical in size. Indeed, the B4 looks a lot less like a J-Bass than the cheaper instrument, bringing to mind many of the high-end basses of the late 80s and 90s. The tobacco burst finish reveals subtle and elegant flaming to the mahogany of the body and, while the contouring on the rear is identical to the C4H, it feels like a more luxurious and comfortable instrument. The neck is a five-piece combination of wenge and rosewood, which could look classy, but the similarity in colour of the two woods, and some unfortunately prominent grain filler means the effect is rather lost. The 24-fret fingerboard again features asymmetric mother-of-pearl dot markers, but this time they're slightly smaller than on the cheaper instrument. It also has a tongue which extends into the body from the 24th fret, with the fingerboard dropping away to body level. It's a great-looking bass, provided you don't look too closely at the back of the neck – although the neck pocket is a better fit than on the cheaper bass.

In both cases, these Corts are a lot of bass for your money.

Hardware

The C4H features a pair of Cort's own MBA1-P4 humbuckers, their enormous polepieces left open to the skies to create quite a visual statement. These are wired to a push/pull volume pot and a blend control, plus a two-band EQ and an active mid-boost circuit. This last is activated with a mini-toggle switch that feels a little aftermarket. It features a small metal tag, which presumably facilitates easy removal of the switch, but is visually a bit of an annoyance. The bridge is a solid black anodised lump with fully adjustable saddles, and looks as though it will last about 100 years. At the sharp end, the C4H sports a set of unbranded closed back tuners which, while accurate and stable enough, are a little too sticky at the start of the turn for my liking. Cort don't specify the nut's composition, but it's a durable-feeling black plastic, probably ABS, and while it's nice to have everything shiny and high-zoot, this will do the job more than adequately, given the budget.

The B4 benefits from brand names in the hardware department: Bartolini provide the Mk1 soapbar pickups and preamp, while the tuners are licensed from Hipshot. The pickups are connected to a single volume and pickup blend control, with a switchable three-band active EQ. The controls, as on the C4H, are black ridged metal knobs which, particularly on the B4, are confusing, with four identical knobs arrayed in a non-intuitive pattern. Bridge and nut are identical to the cheaper instrument, but here the open back tuners are licensed from Hipshot and, despite the name and presumably higher pricetag, they're actually less pleasant in function than those on the cheaper bass.

Sounds

The C4H absolutely lives up to its looks when plugged in. The tone can only be described as trebly: not P-Bass punchy, although there's plenty of punch, but with a real crisp edge to it. This is not to say it's a one-trick pony by any means: there's a really wide range of tone here, but it has a disposition towards a brighter, harder-edged tone. The controls, in the absence of any sort of manual, are somewhat baffling, or at least one of them is: there's a push-pull volume control which seems to switch between the two pickups, and a two band EQ, each with centre détentes. So far so good, but the fourth knob, optimistically called a 'blend control' on Cort's website, does nothing. No matter what combination of

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

CORT B4
PRICE £480 APPROX
Body: Mahogany
Neck: Wenge and rosewood
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Scale: 34"
Frets: 24
Finish: Open pore natural, open pore mahogany, tobacco burst
Tuners: Hipshot
Bridge: EB12, adjustable
Pickups: Bartolini MK1-4/F & MK1-4/R with Bartolini MK-1 EQ
Controls: Volume, blend, 3 band EQ with on/off switch

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Handsome, flexible and well thought out
Minus: Perhaps a little anonymous
Overall: A bass for all reasons, if that's what you need

CONTACT DETAILS

www.cortguitars.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★

settings you use (and we tried everything) rotating this knob does nothing whatsoever to the sound. This is hardly a surprise if, as we surmise, the push/pull volume is a pickup switch. Regardless, the mid boost acts as advertised, and with judicious tweaking, this bass will do almost anything you want. Its comfort zones, however, are clearly at the punchy end of the spectrum, and we enjoyed playing funky slap and early Cure-type riffs more than anything.

The B4 is even more of a bass for all seasons: there's a much deeper, richer resonance to the tone, and while this is once more a very flexible bass, its strong suit is definitely more with the thunder than the lightning. The controls are rather more comprehensible, too. This time the blend control does what it says on the tin, swinging through the palette from the rich, sonorous neck pickup to the throatier, but, nevertheless, fat-sounding bridge. The switchable three-band EQ, which might at first seem redundant, is actually a really useful stage. Set the EQ knobs to their centre détentes, and you'll find the switch has no effect, meaning you can set your amp up to give a nice usable tone for most things with the onboard EQ set flat. You can then set up a much punchier tone for soloing or a shift of mood, and have that available at the flick of a switch. It has to be said that the B4 is not the bass with the most character on the market, but with such a range of tones at your fingertips, it makes an ideal journeyman's friend, slotting in wherever you need it to.

Conclusion

In both cases, these Corts are a lot of bass for your money. We've seen them described as mid-range basses for low-range money, and it's hard to argue with that. The C4H has more character, and while arguably it is more limited for that, if it fits the bill for what you play, it's a colossal bargain. There are compromises, but at this price for an excellent quality bass, they can be forgiven, possibly with the exception of the orphan control-with-no-function. The B4 is more anonymous both in looks and in tone, but far more universally usable because of this. It's the sort of bass you might carry as a backup to your high-end kit, or which would cover all basses (pun intended, at least after the fact) in a covers band. Whichever floats your boat, it's clear that Cort deserve a bit more attention than they currently get, and we recommend trying a few.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

CORT C4H
PRICE £330 APPROX

Body: Mahogany
Neck: Wenge
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Scale: 34"
Frets: 24
Finish: White pearl, black satin
Tuners: Cort die cast
Bridge: EB12, adjustable
Pickups: Cort MBA1P-4 / MBA1P-4 humbuckers with active mid boost
Controls: Push/pull volume, 2 band EQ, blend control, mid booster

WHAT WE THINK

Plus: Unique looking, with a distinctive tone
Minus: Gappy neck pocket, blend control that doesn't
Overall: A colossal bargain, as long as upfront tone is your priority

CONTACT DETAILS

www.cortguitars.com

BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY	★★★½☆
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★★

David Ellefson Rock Shop App and Pocketlabworks iRiffPort iOS Digital Audio Guitar Connection Price £2.99/£70 approx

David Ellefson

Rock Shop App and Pocketlabworks iRiffPort iOS Digital Audio Guitar Connection

Joel McIver test-drives Megadeth bassist David Ellefson's mobile studio app – in the hope that it will magically transform him into a gold-selling bassist with the picking hand of the Terminator…

Practice rooms, eh? A totally outdated concept. Who needs to get off the sofa, lug a load of basses and a massive amp out of the house, stick them in the back of your Nissan Bluebird, drive to some dingy shed on an industrial estate and load them out again? Especially when you have to pay a small fortune if you break their amp to a resentful youth whose idea of hard work is taking his feet off the desk when he needs to get more coffee.

No, what we bassists need is a rehearsal studio in our pocket which we can take out and use between repeats of Heartbeat. And here's that very thing, courtesy of Pocketlabworks, Inc., an American app developer, in conjunction with Megadeth bassist (and recent *BGM* cover star) David Ellefson. For a measly three quid you can download the Rock Shop app from the Apple Store and use it on your iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad. Obviously the thing is easier to use if you've got the last of these devices, given its much larger screen area, but there's also something very cool about whipping out your phone and casually remarking to your manager/drummer/current groupie, 'Yeah man, I carry my studio in my back pocket, next to my silver coke spoon.' While wearing mirrored sunglasses…

Give the Rock Shop a tap and up pops a home screen called 'The Deck.' You're then given the choice of five subsequent screens: Amp, with horizontal sliders for Volume, Bass, Mid and Treble (plus on-off LEDs for 'Brite' and 'Limiter'); FX, which provides chorus and flanger controls and parameters for each such as rate, depth, slapback and noisegate; Cab, which allows you to emulate a 4x12" or 1x18" cabinet; Music, which we'll come to in a second; and Setup, which gives you a feedback control option (for headphone use) and instructions. By the way, the app works for guitar as well as bass, so for each of those options, you can go the six-string route too, should you prefer.

The FX screen is the most fun: although Ellefson's trademark scooped sound is dialled in by default, you can alter the EQ as much as you like, bringing you a surprisingly wide spectrum of tones.

Now, you'll need to invest in a connector such as Pocketlabworks' snappily-titled iRiffPort iOS Digital Audio Guitar Connection (or a similar product) to physically attach your bass to the Apple device you're using, which is a slight shame as the one we saw costs about 70 quid. Then again, you pay for what you get, and there's no doubt that the connection betwixt instrument and operating system does produce a sound of great clarity and tonal range, as you'll see when you start to tweak the various control options. The FX screen is the most fun: although Ellefson's trademark scooped sound is dialled in by default, you can alter the EQ as much as you like, bringing you a surprisingly wide spectrum of tones. Some of the fidelity will depend on the quality of the headphones or powered external speakers you're using, of course, but even with a basic set of components you'll be impressed by the range of sounds on offer. Of course, it would have been nice if the app had also offered options such as overdrive and delay, but what do you expect for the price of a pint, and anyway you can't have everything. Where would you put it? (That joke is © Ronnie Scott, circa 1970.)

The Music screen is also an all-engrossing experience. You'll need to have iOS 4 to make all the functions work, so if you've got an earlier version of Apple's operating system, you're stuffed (but again, what do you expect for the price of a pint…). Assuming you do have the latest version of the platform, then you have the option of slowing down the songs in your music folder to allow you to play along with them. There's also a nifty way of tuning Peace Sells… But Who's Buying?, probably Megadeth's best-known album, to standard tuning: it was originally recorded a quarter-tone down, largely to make it sound heavier, but also to irritate people.

There's so much to play with in the Rock Shop app that there'll be no excuse for boredom when you're on the tourbus, and it's obviously a small enough bit of kit to suit life on the road (and on a budget). A more sophisticated and therefore more expensive app might offer a recording and/or file export facility, but as the Rock Shop stands, it's a great way of experimenting with tone and practising bass parts.

The Pocketlabworks iRiffPort iOS Digital Audio Guitar Connection (how we love typing that) is very much like an Apple product, with its clean lines and white cable, and will no doubt attract thousands of Steve Jobs disciples for that reason alone, but it's a high-quality item notwithstanding. There's not an awful lot we can say about it here – it's a cable with a jack plug on one end, an iOS connector on the other and a headphone socket at the instrument end – but from the slick feel of the connection points and the robust engineering of the seals, it feels and looks like a heavy-duty (but usable) accessory for digital music-making. More power to the developers, we say.

WIN!

See The Low End in this very issue for details of how to win both the app and connector. Go on, you know you want to…

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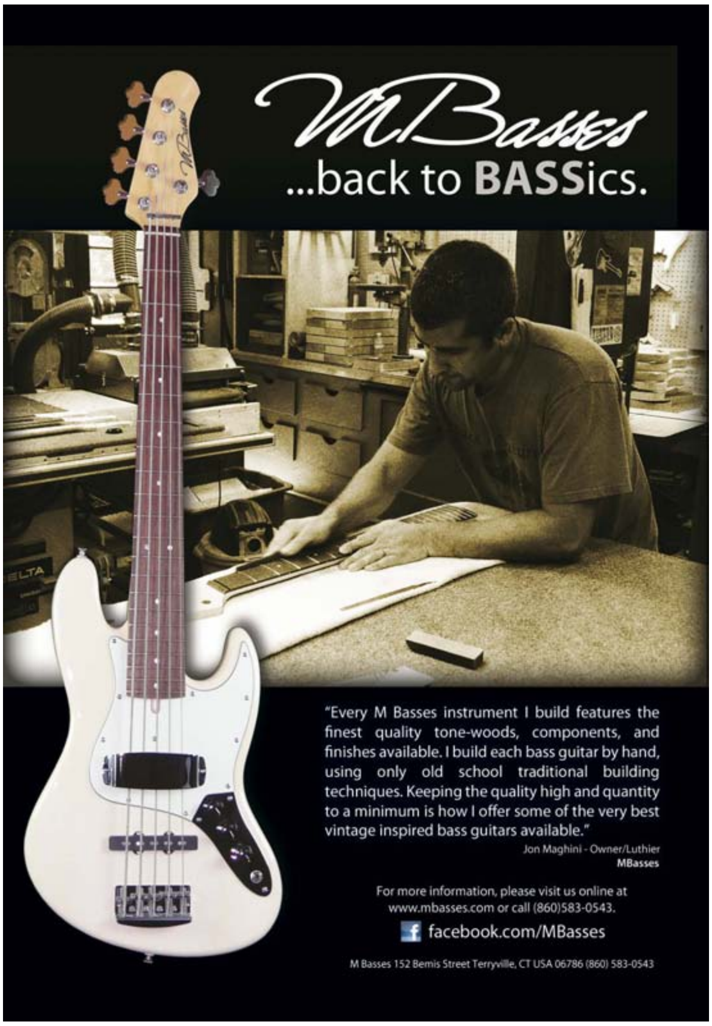
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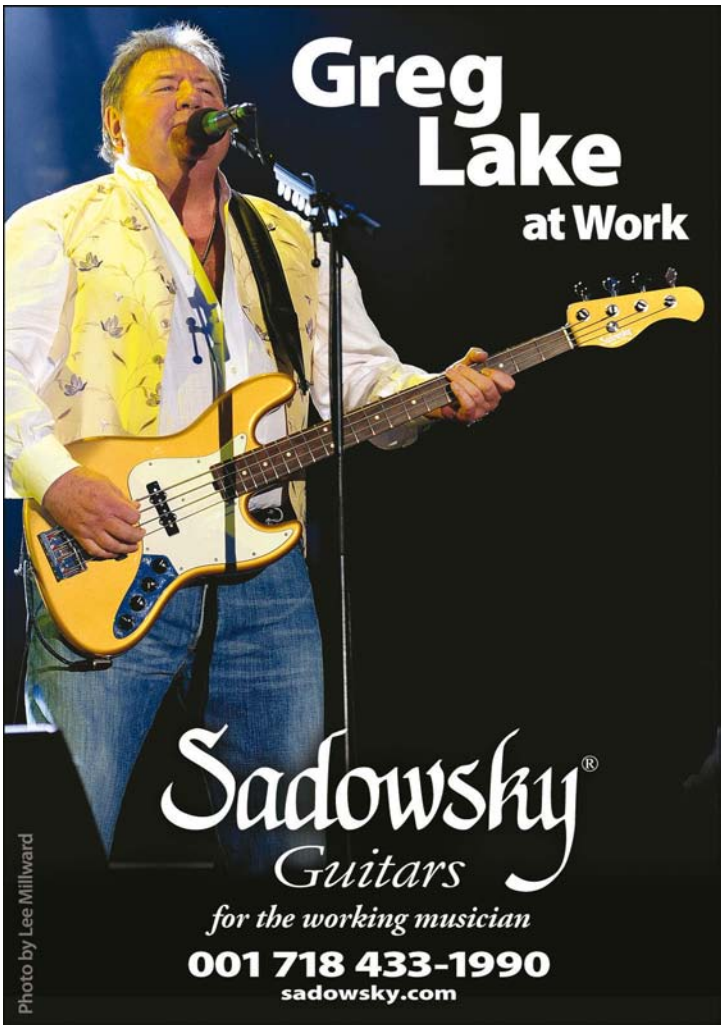
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Electro-Harmonix

Ravish Sitar Pedal

Want to apply the sounds of the East to your bass? Joel McIver adopts the lotus position and plugs in...

Warning: this product will make you feel hungry. Activate Electro-Harmonix's ravishing (ho ho) new sitar emulator and you may well find yourself salivating at the thought of a nice chicken tikka masala, like Pavlov's dog but with a bass instead of a collar marked 'Rover.' So convincing are the tones emitted by the Ravish that you may imagine yourself as some kind of Indian sitar guru, although bona fide experts on the instrument would no doubt laugh at the idea.

A little sitar info first. As you'll know if you've ever seen, let alone played, one of these fearsome-looking instruments, the sitar has two sets of strings: five lead strings and a large number (it varies) of 'sympathetic strings,' so called because you don't actually play them, they just resonate in harmonic sympathy with whatever you're playing on the lead strings. The overall effect is a lush soundscape of vibrations which resonate behind your lead melody, or at least that's what happens if the instrument is in tune (no small feat: tuning a sitar is like pushing treacle up a hill with a spoon). Therefore, any effects pedal which seeks to turn your bass into a sitar has to be equipped to emulate both sets of strings.

Now, this is where the Ravish pedal is clever. Take a look at the three 'Levels' controls: these allow you to mix the relative volume of your dry signal, your lead sound and the artificial sympathetic strings, the last of which appear from nowhere when you play a note. Next to the levels you have the two timbre knobs, 'timbre' being a cute name for what we would usually label 'tone.' These basically roll treble and bass on or off, again for lead and sympathetic strings.

Have a tweak of these five controls and you'll be in sitar heaven – or should that be sitar *swarga loka* (thanks Wikipedia)? Assuming you have a vague idea of the correct scales, you can run around the fretboard all day, doing your best Ravi Shankar impression while the neighbours wonder what the hell is going on. Note that you'll need plenty of top end from the timbre controls, your bass controls, your amp or ideally all three, plus a set of new strings if possible: sitars are known for their bright, crisp tone, and without that sound the sympathetic strings can get lost.

The Ravish doesn't stop there, offering a sophisticated mode control (the white knob) which you can rotate through a sequence of preset tones or press once to move through key, decay and modulation modes. Of these, the last is the most relevant for bassists, offering you parameters for tone bending which enables a more realistic sound. You can also hold down the control to set a preset sound of your choice. It's a solid, well-engineered unit, as it should be at £175.

The question is, what is the application for bass players? The Ravish does make a splendidly sitar-esque sound, but fiddle with the mix and tone controls and you'll find a warm, almost overdriven tone which you may find useful. Higher-register melodies benefit most from the sitar emulation for obvious reasons: is there such a thing as a bass sitar? Alternatively, you can roll off the dry and lead signals completely and allow the sympathetic strings to ring out alone: this produces an effect rather like a swell, ringing fully a second or so after you hit the string, and this, believe us, is a beautiful thing. There's even a separate out socket for you to send this portion of the sound to a dedicated amp or channel.

Now, what was that quote about music being the food of love...?

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RAVISH SITAR PEDAL
PRICE: £175
Made in: USA
Diemensions: 20.3x8.9x17.8cm
Features: Lead and sympathetic level and timbre controls, key and modulation speed of drone, decay length and Q of lead

WHAT WE THINK

It's the best sitar emulator on the market, and offers a surprising amount of versatility.
Plus: The sitar tone is fantastic, looks amazing, rewards setting experimentation.
Minus: Your bandmates might not appreciate you turning all their songs in Ravi Shankar b-sides
Overall: Some may question its necessity, but it's a fun unit that has hidden depth of sound and versatility.

CONTACT DETAILS

Electro-Harmonix
+1 (718) 937 8300
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BGM RATING OUT OF FIVE

BUILD QUALITY	★★★★★
SOUND QUALITY	★★★★★
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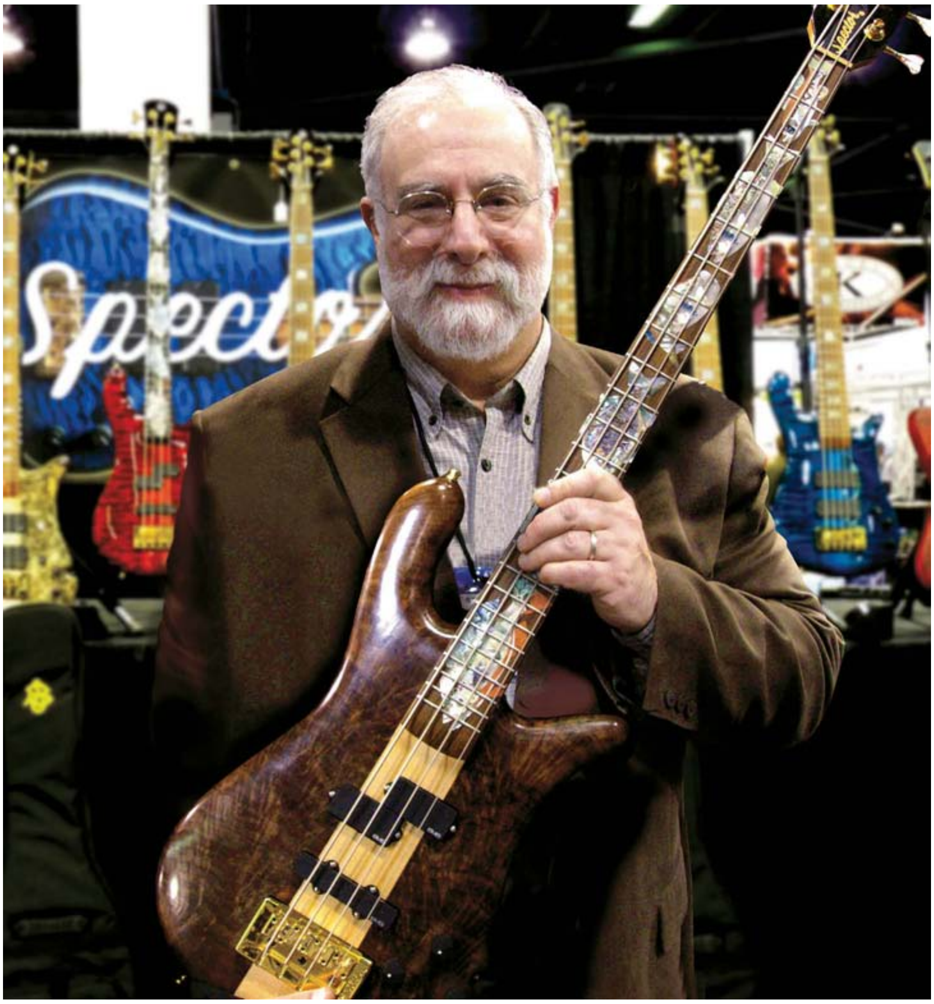

THE WOODSHED

Stuart Spector takes Mike Flynn inside Spector HQ

Having created one of the most influential, and imitated, bass designs since Leo Fender's all-conquering body shapes, Spector Basses' luthier and company director Stuart Spector made a rare visit to the UK this March for the London Bass Guitar Show. A quietly spoken yet highly articulate man, he talked about the company's early days, the secret to Spector's enduring designs and what keeps the Spector brand so strong today.

"I've always wanted to do an ad with a few perfect shapes on it; the Spector NS Bass, an egg, the earth, the Venus De Milo lined up," says Spector with a wry smile. This list of 'perfect shapes' wasn't just biased thinking on his part, but was in fact inspired by a security guard at the Chicago NAMM show some years back, as he elaborated: "There was this guy, a security guard, who happened to be stationed at the door near our booth. He was a Chicago native and after a couple of days, he came over and said to me, 'I've been looking at those basses and I've got to tell you the design on that is just perfect. It's like some shapes are just perfect, like the egg' – and I never forgot what this guy said, because it touched me."

This is the kind of spontaneous compliment that anyone loves to receive, but for Spector and his influential designs, it was proof of the inherent intelligence at the root of the Spector NS bass and its sleek ergonomic looks. Its initials refer to its designer, Ned Steinberger, as Spector explains with pride. "Ned is a genius. He comes from a family of geniuses: his dad was one of the three co-discovers of the neutrino and won the Nobel Prize in 1988. Ned said they threw a hell of a party for that. Every time I see Ned, primarily at the shows now, he goes 'Yeah, you're the guy who got me involved in this' and then grabs me by the throat! I've been really lucky to work with some really cool people. Vinnie Fodera was my first apprentice. It really was a unique confluence of people, materials and situations."

Spector Basses began life in a golden age of both resources and rock'n'roll, the mid 1970s – when the music scene was booming, and top-grade materials were plentiful. With his first workshop based in Brooklyn, New York, Spector found himself among some remarkable emerging talents. The fact that Steinberger happened to share the same workshop space as Spector and his plucky band of youthful luthier talents proved serendipitous, he says: "That design aesthetic and concept was totally related to Ned's experience in chair design, and the ergonomic relationship of an object to its form, function and the human body and the way they have to interact together. That's completely where that evolved from."

He adds: "Ned was designing furniture and was taking courses at the Cooper-Hewitt Design Museum. He had worked at Thonet Furniture, designing industrial chairs, some of which wound up in airports, he came back into the shop and got interested in what we were doing and said 'Oh, I could design a bass.' And within a few days had made the prototype of the NS Bass, which we've refined over the years."

The Brooklyn waterfront was teeming with freighters loaded with prime pieces of exotic timber, as Spector recalls with

obvious relish. "At that time Brooklyn was a great place to start doing what I did," he says, "because I could go literally less than one mile to the waterfront in Brooklyn and there were hardwood importers. There were huge brick warehouses with ebony, rosewood, mahogany, bubinga… everything imaginable. I'll never forget going through the warehouse and going through on to the back. There was a freighter tied up from Africa, that was hoisting bubinga timbers out of it that are about 18 inches square. The place was unbelievable."

He continues: "Then three blocks away there was a metal wholesaler who supplied brass, aluminium and things we originally made hardware like bridges and tailpieces

from. It was a great place and time to be trying do what we were doing, and a great time of resources, a confluence of availability and some really exotic things. The Fodera workshop is [still] on the waterfront in Brooklyn, pretty close to that area that I was talking about."

Spector's approach to his business is pragmatic, as he explains: "To use an automotive analogy, I would say a company like Alembic were at the Rolls-Royce level and we always tried to hit the Cadillac level! You know, we're making a really good piece of gear here, but it's not astronomical [in price]." So how does he go about balancing factors like build quality and high-grade materials with affordability? "Well, at different points in the product line it gets balanced in different ways: you have to decide what's important to focus on if we are going to produce something at this price point. One of the things that's always paramount in our concerns is that the neck is the core of the instrument. We make a neck that is reliable, strong and plays properly, and will continue to do that for a really long time. Because if the instrument is not going to function in that form then it's useless, and you're only going to make someone unhappy – and that's the last thing we want."

He adds: "That structural aspect is the prime concern, and then cosmetic aspects are secondary where we factor in what wood or hardware we can add in. I have a bass here at the show, a neck-through USA model, whose list price is about £4000, which is a considerable sum of money. But the thing I can say to somebody, in all honesty, is 'Hey, this is

an instrument which, if you like this, you will hopefully play it every day for the rest of your life and be able to pass it on to your kids, and in turn their kids.' Factored in like that, you get pretty good bang for your buck."

It's the fact that Spector gets positive feedback from players of all levels that seals his love of producing handcrafted basses, whether at the affordable end of the price range or a sumptuous neck-through NS, Euro or USA bass. As he tells us, "Building instruments is fun and satisfying, and it's a rare opportunity in this day and age to make something that has durability as one of its parameters. In a world of disposable commodities, how rare is it to have the privilege of making something that you are intentionally trying to make well enough so that it will last hundreds of years?"

Info: www.spectorbass.com.

CHRIS HANBY

Chris has amassed a staggering amount of insightful, interesting and sometimes irrelevant information on bass guitar equipment during his career as a professional bassist. Some would say it's a gift, others that he is a nerd – either way we continue to push boxes of electronics under his nose and make him report to us on his favourites.

Skreddy Supa Tone

This month we go in search of forgotten fuzz tones from a bygone era. If there's a fuzz pedal we bassists revere, it's the Big Muff. We tend to favour the green or black Russian incarnations, as they are renowned for their legendary low-end. A close second on the fuzz 'hall of fame' would most likely be the Coloursound Tonebender. So how about this, a Muff in Tonebender's clothing?

Marc Ahlfs, the owner of Skreddy Pedals and creator of some of the finest boutique Big Muff clones ever made, saw the potential of the '74 Supa Tonebender (heavily based on the Big Muff circuit) and based his Supa Tone pedal on the original circuit. So let's see if all this transistor tweaking was worth it. Is this a nostalgic resurrection of a long dead dodo, or a chance to revel in a forgotten classic? Let's take a closer look: ready, Skreddy, go!

History

The explosion of popular music in the early 60s saw guitar players first beginning to experiment with the latest transistor technology. The first fuzz pedals featured early transistors, as they were much smaller and more reliable than the vacuum tubes they replaced. By the middle of the decade, demand for fuzz pedals was high, partly due to the difficulty in getting them outside the US, and so the proprietors of London's famous Macari's Musical Exchange decided to commission their own. The brothers Larry and Joe Macari asked effects enigma Gary Hurst to design a circuit, which he duly did, and the Sola Sound Tonebender was born.

Since then, the Tonebender has been through many different versions, guises and clones. Various circuit tweaks, re-badges and special editions have given us such a bewildering array of pedals bearing the Tonebender name that I could practically write a book on the subject. Our focus today, however, is on one particular version – the 1974 Supa Tonebender. Unusually, it featured a larger casing than the earlier versions, and silicon transistors. The circuit was also different from previous models in that it was based on the EHX Big Muff, but with the two clipping diodes in the initial gain stage removed. This made it very loud, aggressive and bass-heavy. The Tonebender's appeal has remained strong since its inception, and today it's still hailed as one of the most influential fuzz pedals ever created.

In Use

On opening the box, you're presented with a solid, sturdy unit with a pleasing weight and feel. The size is great: my board-hogging Big Muff was disposed of long ago for a smaller pedal, not because of the sound but due to its hefty size. The Skreddy's standard Hammond 1590b-sized enclosure is perfect. Emblazoned on the front is the Supa Tone logo in the familiar purple Tonebender font. The three machined chrome knobs (a Skreddy trademark) are labelled in the same way as the original '74 Supa Tonebender: sustain, volume and tone. There is also a mini toggle switch that offers both the stock mid-scoop or flattened-out mids. As you'd expect, you have a nice bright status LED, a 9V DC socket and instrument and amp jack sockets.

Plugging in and stepping on the Skreddy, you're immediately enveloped in a lush blanket of fuzz. It is, as you'd expect, a lot like the Big Muff in character: intense, raspy and with the familiar whump to the low-end. I was actually quite surprised at how close the likeness is to the Muff. I quickly A/B'd it with my trusty black Russian, and the similarity was uncanny. The structure of the saturation is almost identical. Where it differs is in the high mids and top end, where it has much more presence and bite. This is perhaps Skreddy's masterstroke, as it means that when using it with bass, not only do you keep all the fatness in the low-end, but the potency and power in the highs cut through the band. This is a very pleasing phenomenon, and one not to be sniffed at. The handy mid shift switch only goes to enhance the 'knife through butter' quality of the Supa Tone, and I'd advise keeping the mids switched in if playing in a band with distorted guitars.

The sustain knob works much like the stock Muff, increasing the distortion as you turn it clockwise. You can also turn the Sustain right down to almost zero and produce a very usable low gain overdrive too. The volume control is exactly that, increasing the output gain as you turn the knob. You can balance this with your clean sound or crank it for a boost, if you choose. The tone control also allows scope, from dark break-up when set fully anti-clockwise, through to face-melting ferocity hard clockwise.

With meticulous attention to detail, Skreddy have created a contemporary version of the Supa Tonebender that has many benefits such as modern construction and format, with fuzz that retains all the personality and dynamics of the original while preserving low-end and producing magical sustain.

Conclusion

This pedal appears to deliver quite a specific role, but one that the market is crying out for – a high-gain fuzz with full, weighty low-end, throaty mids and unclouded harmonics. Most bass fuzz pedals tend to sound great at home, but in the mix of a band they are instantly lost. The Skreddy, however, delivers all the fuzz you'll ever need, but with a character that penetrates any amount of guitar shredding. It's the Big Muff for all occasions, and all in a pedalboard-friendly package. The Supa Tone sees Skreddy Pedals nod towards the modern bass player, offering us the chance to step back in time and revisit a long-overlooked treasure.

Availability

The Skreddy Supa Tone is available from Skreddy's UK distributor, www.joespedals.com for £159.

Alternatives

Well, if you want to sample the original you can trawl the forums and auction sites for a 1974 Supa Tonebender: I wish you luck, they do pop up from time to time. Expect to pay around £200 for a boxed original in good condition. You could also try the reissued Coloursound Tonebender. Although it is quite a different beast, it does work well on bass and is available new from www.macaris.co.uk for £149. There is also a vast array of Big Muff models available. The best option (and probably the cheapest) is the Bass Big Muff, which costs circa £60. It has a blend control that enables you to add your clean signal in to taste.

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Bass Combos

6762 - A arena BASS45 (45W, 1x12)
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)
4942 - AER Amp Two (240W, 1x12)

Ashdown Engineering

4389 - Ashdown 220 Touring 112 (220W, 1x12)
4388 - Ashdown 220 Touring 115 (220W, 1x15)
4385 - Ashdown 330 Touring 115H (300W, 1x15)
4386 - Ashdown 330 Touring 210H (307W, 2x10)
4382 - Ashdown 550 Touring (550W, 1x15)
5066 - Ashdown 550 Touring Hybrid (550W, 2x10)
6759 - Ashdown ABM C115 500 Evo 3 (575w, 1 x15)
8712 - Ashdown ABM414H 4 x 10 Bass Cabinet
8714 - Ashdown After Eight 20 Bass Combo
5667 - Ashdown After Eight (15W, 1x8)
4396 - Ashdown DP200 Drophead 15H (200W, 1x15)
8757 - Ashdown Electric Blue 12 220
8758 - Ashdown Electric Blue EB15 220
5669 - Ashdown EB180 12 Evo2 (180W, 1x12)
5668 - Ashdown EB180 15 Evo2 (180W, 1x15)
5665 - Ashdown Five Fifteen (100W, 1x15)
8751 - Ashdown Five Fifteen ABM100 Bass Combo
8753 - Ashdown Five Fifteen Mini Rig 100
4397 - Ashdown LB30 Drophead 115H (30W, 1x15)
6454 - Ashdown MAG C115-300 Evo2 (300W, 1x15)
6453 - Ashdown MAG C410T-300 Evo 2 (300W, 3x10)
8718 - Ashdown Mag C115 300 Evo III Bass Combo
8722 - Ashdown Mag C210T 300 Evo III Bass Combo
8720 - Ashdown Mag C210T 300 Bass Combo
8727 - Ashdown Mag C410T 600 Evo III
8750 - Ashdown Perfect Ten 40 Bass Combo
5666 - Ashdown Perfect Ten (30W, 1x10)
8183 - Ashdown TourBus 10 Union Jack
5224 - Ashdown Tourbus 10 (10W, 1x6.5)
5062 - Ashdown Tourbus 15 (15W, 1x8)
8988 - EA Euphonic Audio iAmp 350 Bass Head
8987 - Eden Nemesis RS410 Combo

Fender

4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
8284 - Fender Rumble 30 Bass Combo
4237 - Fender Rumble 350 (350W, 2x10)
5684 - Gallien Kruger 700RB 115 (320W, 1x15)
9008 - Hartke HMH112C Bass Combo

LINE 6

6019 - Line6 LowDown LD150 (150W, 1x12)
6018 - Line6 LowDown LD175 (175W, 1x15)
6017 - Line6 LowDown LD300 Pro (300W, 1x15)
5502 - Line6 LowDown LD400 Pro (400W, 2x10)
6020 - Line6 LowDown Studio 110 (75W, 1x10)
5382 - Line6 Lowdown LD15 (15W, 1x8)

Mark bass

6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P (400W, 2x10)
6238 - Mark Bass CMD103H (600W, 3x10)
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (400W, 1x12)
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (400W, 1x15)
5473 - Mark Bass Micromark (50W, 1x6)
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (400W, 1x12)
5474 - Mark Bass Mini CMD151P (400W, 1x15W)
5471 - Mark Bass Minimark (250W, 2x6)

Marshall

5660 - Marshall MB15 (15W, 1x8)
6768 - Marshall MB150 (150W, 1x15)
5659 - Marshall MB30 (30w, 1x10)
5433 - Marshall MB4210 (450W, 2x10)
5658 - Marshall MB4410 (450W, 4x10)
6769 - Marshall MB60 (60W, 1x12)

ORANGE

5232 - Orange Crush PiX 100BXT (100W, 1x15)
5234 - Orange Crush PiX 25BX (25W, 1x8)
5233 - Orange Crush PiX 50BXT (50W, 1x12)
8061 - Peavey MAX126 10 Watt Bass Amp Combo
5965 - Peavey Max 112 (35W, 1x12)
5964 - Peavey Max 115 (50W, 1x15)

Roland

6320 - Roland CB100 (100W, 1x12)
4433 - Roland CB120XL Cube 120X (120w, 1x12)
4435 - Roland Cube 20XL BASS (20W, 1x8)
4434 - Roland Cube 60XL (60W, 1x10)
5678 - Roland Microcube Bass RX, (5W, 4x4)
8252 - SWR Black Beauty 350W Bass Amp Combo
5008 - Stagg 20 BA (20W, 1x8)
4738 - Stagg ADBA40 Upright (40W, 1x8)
4599 - TC Electronic BG500 115 500W, 1x15
4599 - TC Electronic BG500 115 (500W, 1x15)

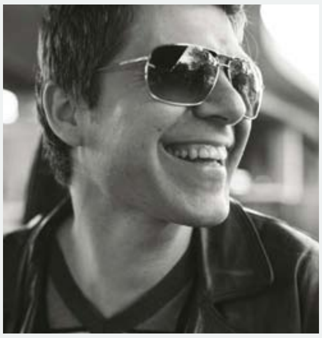
Bass Heads

4387 - Ashdown 330, 330W
4398 - Ashdown 427 Small Block 427W
4384 - Ashdown 550, 550W
8706 - Ashdown ABM1000 Lite Evo III
8752 - Ashdown ABM100h Bass Head
8704 - Ashdown ABM2000 Lite Evo III
6760 - Ashdown ABM500 EVO III 575W
6250 - Ashdown ABM500RC Evo III 575W
6761 - Ashdown ABM900 EVO 3, 575+575W
4399 - Ashdown JJ500 JJ Burnel Sig 575W
5338 - Ashdown BTA400 400W
8707 - Ashdown CTM300 Classic Tube Magnifier
4395 - Ashdown Drophead DP200H 200w Valve
5064 - Ashdown Little Bastard 30, 30W
4875 - Ashdown Little Bastard 30, 30W UK
8708 - Ashdown Little Bastard 550 Head
5671 - Ashdown Little Giant 350, 350W
6455 - Ashdown MAG300H Evo III 300W
9056 - Ashdown Mag300H Evo2 Bass Amp Head
8713 - Ashdown Mag600 Head Evo III Bass Head
5339 - Ashdown Mag600H Evo 2 575W
8710 - Asdown MiBass 220
7975 - Ashdown MiBass 550 Bass Amp Head
5687 - Gallien Kruger BL600 Backline 300W
9027 - Hartke Kilo 1000 Bass Head
5501 - Line6 LowDown HD400, 400W
5500 - Line6 LowDown HD750, 750W
5675 - Mark Bass Little Mark 250 (250w)
5245 - Mark Bass Little Mark 800, 800W
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III (500w)
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
9035 - Markbass Little Mark Tube Bass Amp Head
5673 - Mark Bass R500 Classic (500W)
5243 - Mark Bass SD1200, 1200W
7962 - Markbass TTE500 Randy Jackson Bass Head
5434 - Marshall 1992LEM 100W
5652 - Marshall MB450H 450W
6618 - Marshall VBA400 Valve 400W
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
5242 - Orange TB1000 1000W Terror
5351 - Orange Terror Bass 500 TB500
5957 - Peavey Pro VB3 300W
5960 - Peavey Tour 450, 450W
5959 - Peavey Tour VB2 225W
5184 - TC Electronic RH450, 450W

Bass Cabinets

8733 - Ashdown 210T Deep Lite Bass Cab
6457 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15)
6458 - Ashdown ABM210H Compact (2x10)
6456 - Ashdown ABM410H (4x10)
4376 - Ashdown ABM610 (6x10)
5677 - Ashdown ABM810 (8x10)
4394 - Ashdown CL115 Large (1x15)
4393 - Ashdown CL410H (4x10)
4392 - Ashdown CL414H Plus Horn (4x10)
4391 - Ashdown CL610 Tilt-Cab (6x10)
4390 - Ashdown CL810 (8x10)
8170 - Ashdown Klystron NEO410H 4 x10 Bass Cab
6452 - Ashdown MAG115 Deep (1x15)
6451 - Ashdown MAG210T Deep (2x10)
6450 - Ashdown MAG410T Deep (4x10)
4375 - Ashdown MAG414T Deep (4x10)
8754 - Ashdown MAG414T Deep Lite
8730 - Ashdown Mag 115 Deep Lite Bass Cab
8755 - Ashdown Mag410T Deep 4 x 10 Bass Cab
8756 - Ashdown Mag810T 8 x 10" Bass Cab
4380 - Ashdown VS-112-125 (1x12)
8692 - Ashdown VS112 125 1 x 12 Bass Cab
4379 - Ashdown VS115 200 (1x15)
8691 - Ashdown VS212 200 2 x 12 Bass Cab
8711 - Ashdown VS412 600 Bass Extension Cab
9007 - Hartke HCH112 Bass Cab
5371 - Line6 LowDown 410 (4x10)
5430 - Mark Bass Classic 152 (2X15)
4766 - Mark Bass NY804 New York 804 (8 x 4)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Ext Cab.
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV 102P (2x10)
6767 - Marshall VBC412 (4x12)
6617 - Marshall VBC810 (8x10)
6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)
5240 - Orange SP210 Smart Power Isobaric (2x10)
5239 - Orange SP212 Smart Power Isobaric (2x12)
5238 - Orange SP410 Smart Power Isobaric (4x10)
6766 - Peavey 410TVX (4x10)
5958 - Peavey Tour 215 (2x15)
5182 - TC Electronic RS210 (2x10)
5181 - TC Electronic RS212 (2x12)
5180 - TC Electronic RS410 (4x10)

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.



STEFAN REDTENBACHER

Stefan 'The Count' Redtenbacher is the bassist, bandleader and writer for Redtenbacher's Funkestra, a fortified jazz-funk band with a strong flavour of groove and tantalising brass work.

www.rbfunkestra.com

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STEFAN REDTENBACHER – 'FUNKYOLOGIES'

Mildly opinionated views on the world of funk bass

Exploration 22: 'Tant pis pour toi!'

Meet Flash Gordon (bassist)…

One topic that has cropped up quite frequently recently is how 'flash' a young bassist should be in order to get a gig. I've already written columns called 'Are chops and funk at odds with one another?' *(Funkyology 9, BGM 66, May 2011)* and 'Bass soloing' *(Funkyology 19, BGM 76, March 2012)*, but let's define the word 'flash'. For the purpose of this column I would like to define 'flash' as performance skills of a virtuoso nature, above and beyond the acceptable professional standard on any given instrument – in our case, the beloved bass. Of course we can keep this game of definitions going by also addressing 'professional standard'. And one thing for sure, the general playing standard of bassists has risen considerably since the arrival of the electric bass courtesy of the 'maker' Leo Fender. The average technical skill set is definitely higher than let's say in the 1960s. However, an investigation of changing musical skills over the decades is worth another column. In short, though, more chops don't necessarily mean better music or a deeper pocket. Since the invention of the P-Bass, there has been a major increase in the accessibility of music information and technology. This was firstly due to the establishment of contemporary music schools – rock and jazz institutions rather than the long-established classical music conservatories – for example the Musician's Institute, which was founded in 1977. Then, of course, the internet, in particular YouTube, allowed almost everyone in the Western world who is interested in learning how to play the bass to lay their hands on plenty of information and material. Obviously, non-technical – in other words, musical – skills are much harder to convey via traditional books and Youtube videos, and consequently there seems to be an army of technically advanced players whose musical skills are not quite at the same standard as their technical skills. Arguably, this has always been the case with younger players, and is normal. When you start out, you're an apprentice of the electric bass learning the tools of the trade. This is followed by a lifelong quest to create great music with these tools. Of course, it is not as simple as doing a three-year apprenticeship after which no new technical skills are acquired. The process is fluent and forever morphing. However, the foundations are laid in the early years of studies, whether formal – at a music school or with a private teacher – or not.

For the apprentice bass player, the obvious question arises of how much of their studies they should dedicate to not only developing their chops (read 'technical skills'), but also their 'flash' chops.

How 'flash' should you be?

So, coming back to my initial question on how 'flash' one needs to be to get noticed in order to get a gig. For the purpose of this exploration I shall view 'a gig' as a standard pop/rock concert, and not a gig in a niche market where a high level of technical skill is necessary to facilitate the music – as in jazz, speed metal, progressive rock and so on. So, let's make the assumption that for a 'standard' rock and pop gig it is not necessary to have heaps of chops on the bass. Other non-musical aspects, like looks or a love for travel and hotel rooms, often appear to be more important!

The paradox

However, here comes the paradox. Having a decent amount of chops on bass means that you can get noticed when you are able to tear it up at a gig or jam session, where you can showcase advanced technical skills on your instrument. Typically, after a sizzling performance you can step down from the bandstand, head high, and ready to share your contact details with the other musicians who are queuing up to get your number. This might well be your way through the rock/pop door and consequently a cool rock/pop gig. Once you've got that gig, you're required to play bass lines that might require only 10 per cent of your chops to perform them well. If you're lucky, you might go out with an act that wants to feature the band, and then you could have a two-minute glory spot, when you can let your chops run red-hot and tear through your favourite riffs to a raucous audience response. But does this warrant dedicating chunks of your practice time to develop 'show chops'?

What do you enjoy most?

To me, it's all to do with how you feel about playing the bass. Do you feel or imagine the bass being played with tons of chops? Do you enjoy ripping it up like Victor Wooten, or laying it down like Bill Laswell? What are your tendencies? Are you craving a solo spot or are you happy 'just' to lay it down? Do you enjoy the physical feeling of slapping your bass or using multiple picking-hand techniques? These things should drive your decisions more than anything else. Also, the musical surroundings that you grow up in obviously shape your vantage point when it comes to chops. A young bassist growing up in Cameroon will most certainly have a different technical and musical approach to a bassist growing up in the London gospel community, a bassist in Cuba or a bassist growing up playing the tuba in an Austrian brass band (in case you were wondering… I didn't!). However, where you grow up doesn't need to be your defining element: the beauty of the web and today's music schools is that anyone with access can immerse themselves into any of

these playing styles and take from it what feels good.

Finally, my opinion is – don't spend an exorbitant amount of time on developing chops when you don't feel like it. Instead, spend time on the things that really get you revved up. It doesn't matter if you want to play along to A Physical Presence by Level 42, Torture by Cannibal Corpse, Heavy Weather by Weather Report, Babylon By Bus by Bob Marley & The Wailers, Only By The Night by Kings Of Leon or Crawfish Siesta by Professor Longhair.

If you genuinely develop the chops for the music that you love most, then you will also find like-minded musicians who dig what you dig, and you'll get your gig whether you have tons of chops or not. If you are by nature exuberant and an outgoing bassist, then let that flourish and you will find your gig. Likewise, if you are comfortable right next to the hi-hat of your drummer without any particular need to come forward into the limelight, you too will find the right gig.

Tant Pis Pour Toi!

Loosely translated from French to English as 'Too bad for you!', this tune came into my head after listening to saxophonist Joe Henderson's 'Black Narcissus' and Wayne Shorter's 'Speak No Evil'. Adding the drum loop in the solo section was a real challenge, particularly as we did that after we recorded the rhythm section. I thought of the title while rehearsing with a French big band in Paris and had absolutely no idea how to follow the (French) instructions of the MD.

This paragraph is taken from the original text accompanying the transcription of my first record, from the last decade of the last century (it sounds a long time ago, which it is). It's not one of my best compositions in my opinion, but it is an important early combination of my favourite styles of music, jazz and funk. The bass-line is still cool, and I would like to believe that if the Funkestra were to take this tune back into the live repertoire we could make it sound a whole lot funkier than it is on my album.

'Tant pis pour toi' intro

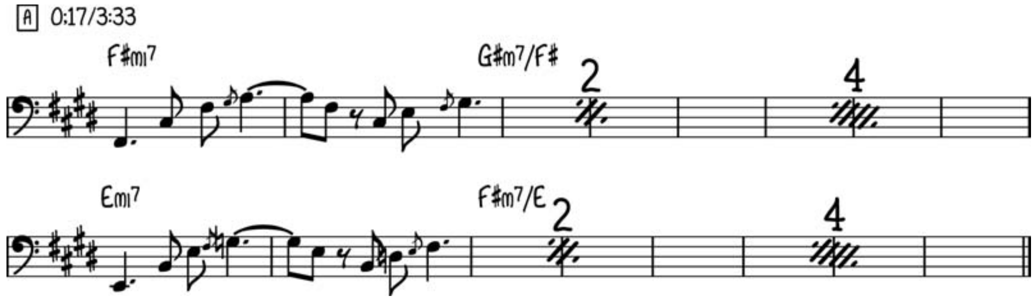
Intro

The key signature shows four sharps: normally this is associated with the key of E major. In this case it is meant to indicate F# Dorian, a very different sound to E major but nevertheless sharing the same number of sharps. The opening two-bar riff features the interval of a minor 10th (a minor third and an octave) and a major 9th (a major second and an octave). The 'shape' and 'margins' of this line are more or less replicated on the Lydian Gmaj7 chord in bar 7 and 8.

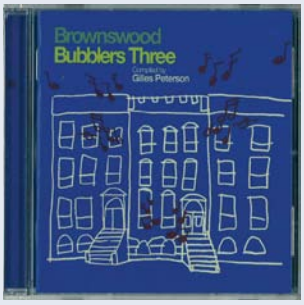
'Tant pis pour toi' - A Section

The A section

The bass-line in this section is almost identical to the opening line with the exception of the short note on beat '1 &' to make the line a little bit more funky and rhythmical. The second half features the same bass-line a whole step down. You could argue that the second half is in the key of D major, or E Dorian, but I decided not to change the key signature to avoid bamboozling the player with constantly changing key signatures and creating more opportunities to misread the pitches.



LISTENING RECOMMENDATIONS



Joe Negro & The Sunshine Band – 'Turn it Out', from Gilles Peterson Presents Brownswood Bubblers Three, 2008. Bass: Julian Crampton

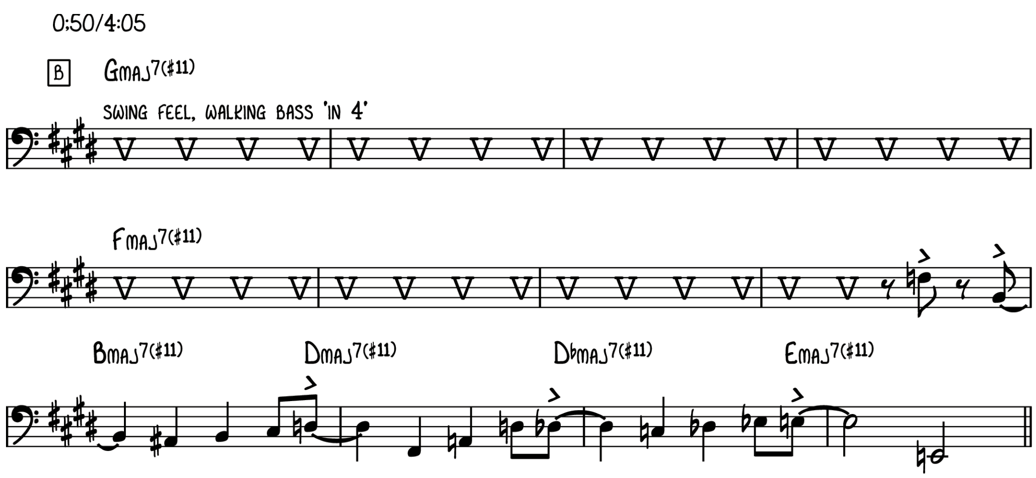
Gordon Goodwin's Big Phat Band – 'Play That Funky Music', from The Phat Pack, 2006. Bass: Rick Shaw

Tower Of Power – 'Credit', from Power, 1988. Bass: Francis 'Rocco' Prestia

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

This month I want to recommend a Youtube clip called 'The Lick' in case you have not seen it yet. Not sure who put this together, but they must have spent a serious amount of time researching and editing it. Well, I think we ought to join them and learn the lick too (in all keys, of course!). Search Youtube for 'the lick' and it's the first result.

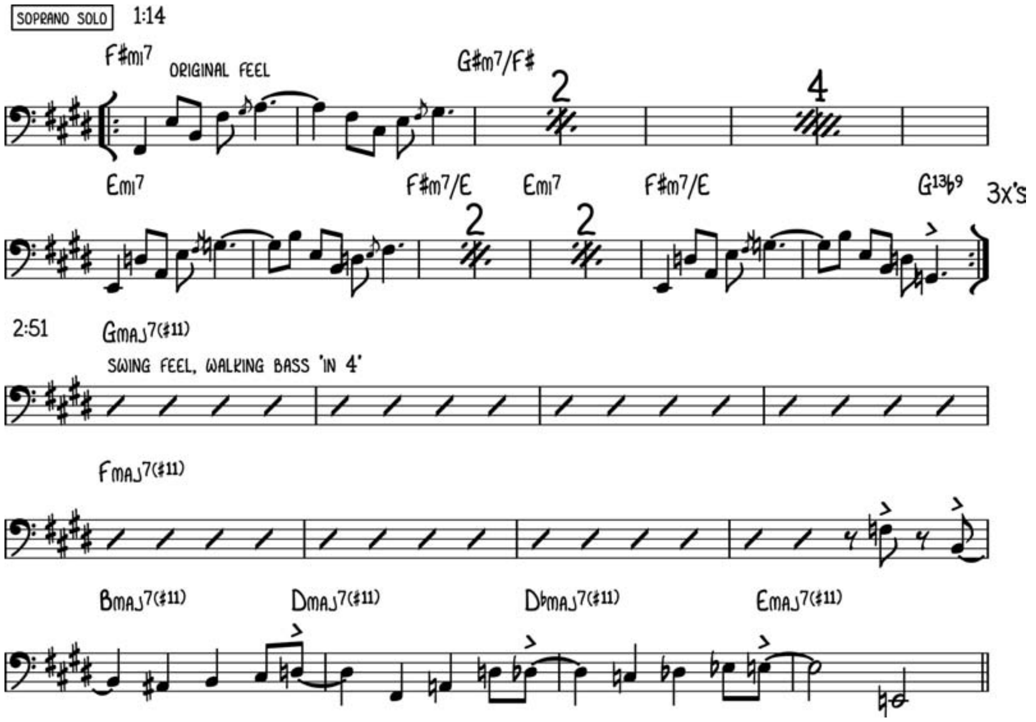
B Section



The B section

The change of feel happens in this section. The groove changes from straight 8th notes to swing 8th notes with a traditional jazz swing feel. I did not transcribe the entire walking bass-line, to give you the opportunity to create your own walking bass line 'in 4'. Playing 'in 4' does not necessarily mean playing four different pitches per bar. Experiment with doubling the same note or with octave displacements of roots and fifths only. The last four bars feature major seventh chords only. This harmonic writing method is called 'constant structure' as only one chord type is featured regardless of the key signature. All the chords 'push' a swing 8th note into the next bar and enhance the 'forward motion' impression.

Soprano Solo Section



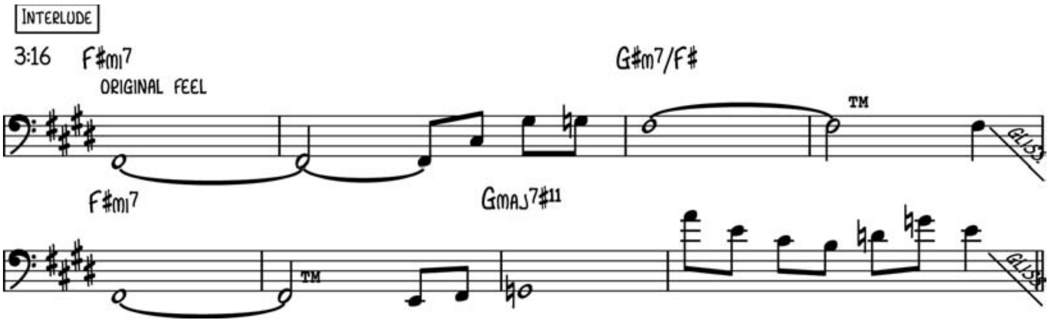
Soprano solo section

This section features the outstanding Austrian tenor and soprano sax player Rob Friedl, who plays an inspired solo. The riff and chord progression of the solo section is very similar to the 'head' progression to honor the jazz tradition. There is a turnaround chord in bar 16 in the form of G13(b9), the tritone substitution for the regular C#7 dominant of the F#min7 chord. After three lots of 16 bars the rhythmic feel is changing to swing, just like in the head section, and again you have an opportunity to create your own walking bass-lines. Just follow the pushed kicks in the last four bars if you also want to create your own bass-lines in that section.

Interlude

Interlude

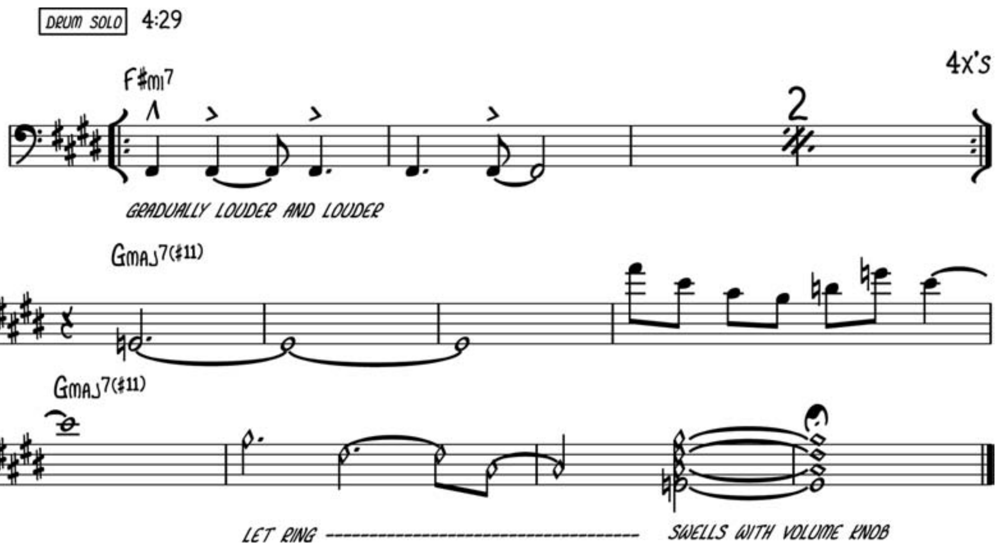
If you are a regular reader of my column you probably know my penchant for 'release' sections after a solo section. I feel that as a composition tool this works well to give both the audience and the players a little moment of aural relief after intense soloing. In this case the interlude is a recapitulation of the intro chord changes with long bass notes accumulating in a short melody with the flute in bar 8 to kick back into the recap of the melody (or 'head').



The Coda Section

The Coda section

The coda section features an ostinato bassline in octave unison with the baritone saxophone. This is the musical platform on which Larry Finn, a fabulous drummer and still member of the Berklee College drum fraternity, unleashes his energetic drum improvisations. While playing the ostinato section, try to steadily increase intensity and volume without speeding up. After 16 bars play the push on beat 2 and hold the long note, followed by the same run as in the 8th bar of the interlude. The tune is finished with a combination of natural harmonics (all above the fourth fret, ie B – F# – C#, from high to low) and the fretted G. Finally swell the volume of this four-note 'double stop' with your volume knob or volume pedal if you use one.



ACTIVITIES

Go to **www.soundcloud.com/rb-funkestra** to listen to this month's track and play along to the 'no bass' (if available) or full version. The respective full bass chart can be downloaded for free at **www.funkybassonline.com.**

REPERTOIRE

This month's chosen tune, 'Tutu', is a classic. It has a great melody and great bass-lines, and is a favourite at bass jams.

Miles Davis – 'Tutu', from Tutu, 1986. Bass: Marcus Miller

Marcus Miller – Tutu', from Tutu Revisited, 2011. Bass: Marcus Miller

SMV – 'Tutu', from Thunder, 2008. Bass: Marcus Miller, Victor Wooten, Stanley Clarke

JANEK GWIZDALA

A member of the Institutes visiting bass faculty, Janek is a solo recording artist, musical director for Capitol recording artist VV Brown, and side man to the likes of Mike Stern, Randy Brecker, Delta Goodrem, Airto and Pat Metheny.

www.janekbass.com

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JANEK GWIZDALA

What are you doing about making your immediate music scene better?

Our man Gwizdala advises you how to survive in the big bad world of music – and maybe come out smiling at the end…

This is a question which we don't ask ourselves nearly enough, even though it is one that isn't that hard to answer with some simple ideas and concepts. If you're going to have any interest in music (never mind the bass for now), there are several things you can do to enhance your experience. Are you a weekend warrior who plays mainly as a hobby? Are you a young musician currently studying somewhere? A pro who's been at it for years? Or a pure fan of the music or the instrument, reading this magazine to be better informed about what it is you love?

You could be all of those things and much more, and what I want to talk about in this article will apply to you no matter what your position in the music industry.

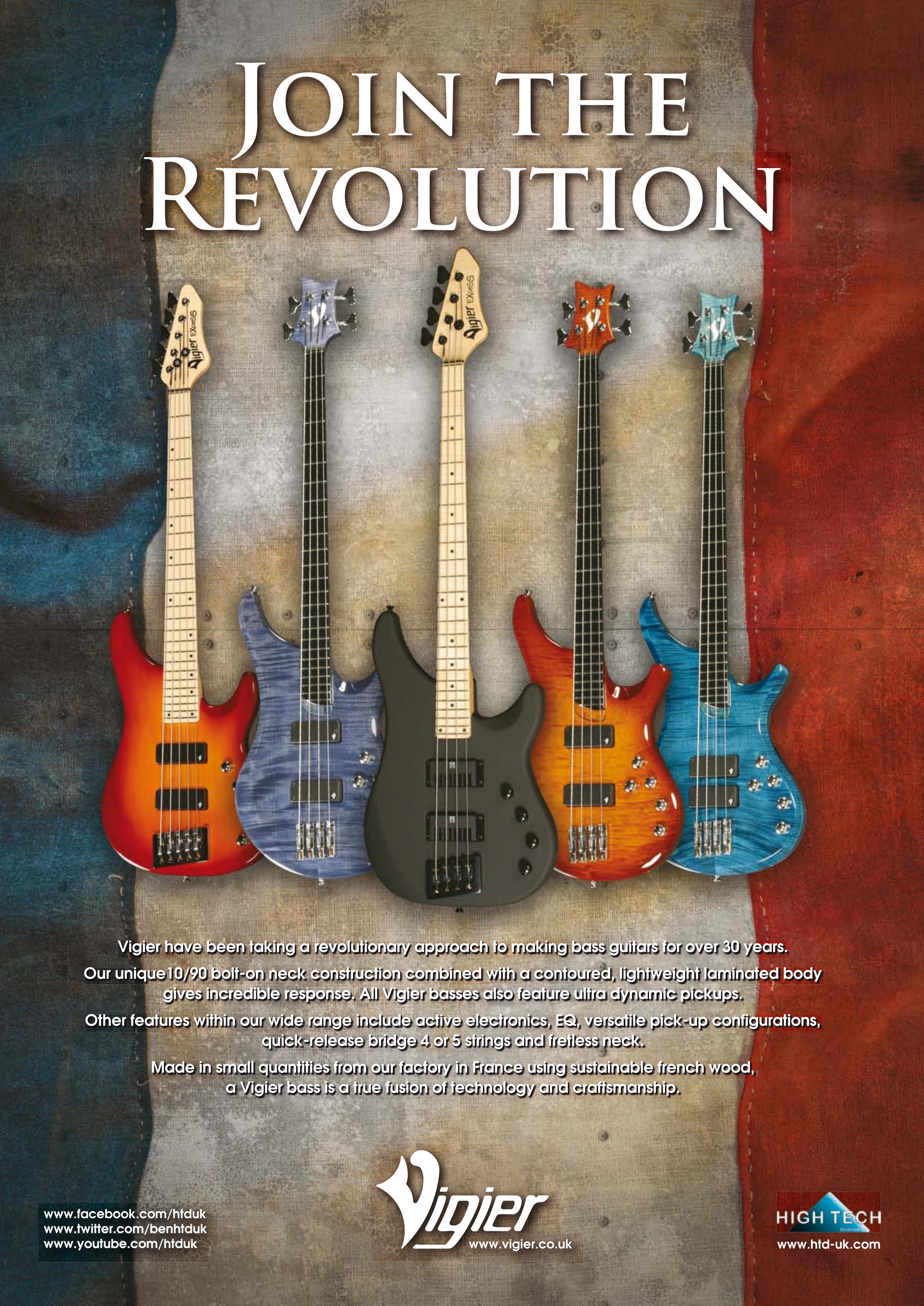
The most important part of my job is to make sure that the industry I chose to work in not only survives, but thrives, so that it may include many more people in the future than it does now. I want to make sure that I'm not only helping to provide a positive and fruitful environment for myself to work in, but that I'm also working on nurturing a positive attitude in the younger generation of players, which will carry on whatever it is I, or anyone else, in my position starts. The way the bulk of the mainstream music industry operates right now is incredibly regressive. It looks back on a bygone era and tries to blame modern technology for a perceived loss in sales. Their flaw? They're comparing a modern, technologically-advanced music industry where communication is open beyond measure, to a past era of record labels, publicists, A&R executives and lawyers, which needed to exist to make a new artist known around the world, using old-school traditional media such as print, radio, and physical recordings. Instead of investing in the new technologies as and when they were invented – such as Napster and pretty much any filesharing concept since – they have tried to plug the fictitious gap in sales which they think they experienced just over a decade ago, when sharing digital information online started becoming a lot easier.

I've had a lot of conversations recently with indie artists who are also still hanging onto that outdated mentality, and it's incredible to me that they haven't adjusted to the modern digital age by adopting some of the techniques I want to share with you today. I've heard phrases like "every torrented file is a lost sale", for instance. And what none of these die-hard traditionalists seem to understand is that firstly, every downloaded file does not equal a lost sale, because only tiny fraction of the people who downloaded your music would actually have been customers had the filesharing service of their choice not existed; secondly, for the most part, each of the people I've interacted with recently play obscure music that has almost no mass commercial value in the mainstream, and so they need to work a million times harder to get their music heard; and thirdly, the people trying to make a case for not giving their music away for free have websites (if they even have them) which look like my grandmother designed them in 1996. They are so full of errors and 404 messages that they make the user barf digitally before ever succeeding in interacting with a potential fan.

My solution? Well, it's not really mine: tons of people do this and it makes a lot of sense: give your music away. Right this minute you can go to www.janekgwizdala.com, click on the Music tab and stream and download all my music for free. That's four studio albums, including my latest album as a leader, It Only Happens Once. Of course, you can pay anything you like for the music, should you feel that it's worth paying for, but the main focus is that there is no pressure on you as someone who might never have heard of me or heard my music before to make a purchase, in order to discover a new sound.

This does a number of things for the health of the music industry, in my opinion. Maybe the most important thing is that it builds trust between the artist and the fan, and helps new music be discovered and shared. If an artist invests in the production of a high-end musical product with some of the best musicians in the industry, as I and many others do, who then tells people to pay what they think it's worth, that should tell the prospective fan a little bit about the commitment that artist has to their music. I think it also inspires an artist to work as hard as they possibly can, to deliver an outstanding product that is an honest representation of what is going on in their musical lives at a given point. It gives an independent artist a lot more responsibility, and ultimately no-one to blame at the end of the day if their product doesn't sell. I think, in fact I know it for a fact, that this helps to create a truly engaged fanbase and a mailing list to communicate with on an ongoing basis. As long as you stay honest and prolific with your musical endeavours, people are going to want to join you for the ride, and be invested in what you do.

Making what you do an essential part of someone else's happiness in life is going to prolong your existence in the industry, and ultimately create more cutting-edge artists and material. Look forward and create your own scene by being honest and hard-working. People appreciate that more than anything, and I think that will ultimately determine the success of not just your career, but the success of this movement of artists who take control of their trajectory and give themselves a far greater chance of reaching realistic goals. Everything is possible, patience is key, and hard work is obligatory.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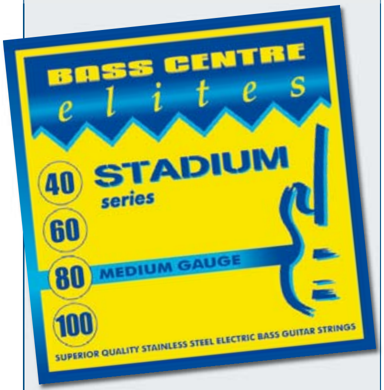
ANDREW MCKINNEY

Andrew is the Head Of Bass at Tech Music School in London and plays with the renowned James Taylor Quartet.

For the full Tuition Tip archive, including sound files and videos, visit Andrew's teacher profile at www.techmusicschool.co.uk. In every issue of this magazine, Andrew features a different class taught at the School, giving you a bite-size chunk of the lesson and an insight into his course.



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ANDREW MCKINNEY

Tuition Tip: Guitar On Bass

Guitarist Interview: John Wheatcroft

Over the last six issues I've talked to various drummers on their opinions on bass, and I for one have learnt a hell of a lot and had a great time in the process! This month I'm changing tack slightly and interviewing a guitarist about bass. My main motivation here is that it's not really other bass players we need to impress if we want to have a successful career playing bass. Knowing what other musicians in the band are after from us is much more relevant, as they're the ones we'll be playing with and booking us for gigs.

What better place to start with than Tech Music School's Head of Guitar, John Wheatcroft. John leads a busy double life as an artist and an educator. He has performed with artists as diverse as Billy Cobham (Miles Davis), Frank Gambale (Chick Corea), Mike Clark and Bill Summers (The Headhunters), and Carl Verheyen (Supertramp). John recently toured the world with both Carl Palmer (ELP) and John Jorgenson (Elton John/ Hellecasters) and he is a regular contributor to both Guitar Techniques and Guitarist magazines (UK), Guitar Part (France) and Guitar World (USA). His first book, Improvising Blues Guitar, published by Schott, has been recently released to rave reviews worldwide. Not only that, but John is a very accomplished bass player himself – much more so than most guitar players who claim to 'play a bit of bass'. In fact, the tour he did with Carl Palmer was on bass so he definitely knows his onions, so to speak! For this interview, however, I asked him to firmly don his guitar-playing hat, and one night after hours at TMS we sat down to thrash it out…

What are the qualities that you as a guitarist most value in a bass player?

"I watched an interview a few weeks ago with Jimmy Carr, and he was talking about the qualities that make a good comedian. He said that the most important thing was that they made the audience feel relaxed. As soon as they realise that the comedian is in control and has command of their attention, then you can relax, they can relax and everyone can enjoy themselves. For me this is directly applicable to what I look for in a bass player. It's not so much about someone being an absolute technique monster, or who can play the most elaborate or complex parts. Above all else, the most important thing is knowing that it's going to be safe.

"In a bassist I look for someone who in equal measure can actively respond to what's going on around them, and can also contribute in a sympathetic way by playing something that's not going to detract from whatever the primary focus might be – the vocal melody, soloist or whatever. It's quite a big ask really – you want to play with someone who would be equally at home in a supportive role, but when the music calls for it, they can sense that and take on a more prominent role. You want to feel safe in the fact that if the music's going in a certain direction that they're going to be able to go with that – they can read those unspoken/non-verbal arrangements that are being created on the fly.

"What I also really value is a bass player who shapes their playing so it's specific to the particular tune, whether that be in a compositional/band-orientated setting, or in something that's more based on improvisation – I'm looking for essentially the same thing. Rather than playing, say, a generic funk bass-line

or aimlessly noodling, they're creating a bespoke part that couldn't exist for anything else. People like Paul McCartney and Andy Fraser of Free are great examples of this approach."

Who are your favourite bass players to work with, and what is it about them that you most value?

"Dave Marks is almost like the bass-playing equivalent of me; he also plays guitar, and I also play bass, so I really like the way he can potentially think the way a guitar player would think and accommodate that, and I can do the opposite, and it works really well together.

" One of the things I like about Dave is that you don't necessarily have to map anything out: you can just play, and feel safe in the knowledge that he's going to go with it. What he plays may not be exactly what you expect, but you know it's always going to work. In actual fact, sometimes he knows my playing well enough to deliberately play something unexpected to see how I react, and it ends up with a really interesting musical situation as a result.

"Alan Thompson is a Scottish bass player who everyone should check out. He played with John Martyn for years and they recorded a lot of albums together. He was also the bass player in John Jorgenson's electric band when I was playing in his acoustic band, but there was a crossover on some gigs where he'd use the same band, and I'd get to play with Alan. He's one of those guys that is just a naturally gifted musician. I'm sure he wouldn't mind me saying this, but he doesn't necessarily know what he's doing a lot of the time, yet he's the kind of guy who can idle over to a piano in a bar and start playing Weather Report tunes, looking round casually and saying, 'Are these the right chords?', and they're perfect – how do you do that? You only have to spend a few minutes speaking to him to realise that he's got a really wide musical appreciation that's bigger than the bass, or anything else for that matter. He likes music, he just happens to play the bass.

"Simon Thorpe is a jazz bass player based in London, and his skill, certainly in the work that he's done with me, is that he can take something that he's seen for the first time and play convincingly as if it's a tune he's been playing all his life, with complete conviction. He did some recordings with me recently and he literally saw the charts, we played through them and talked a bit about the arrangements, and then within 15 minutes he was putting his bass back in the car. When you listen to the recordings it sounds like a band that's been rehearsing and done 20 gigs, and this is at the end of the tour – incredible!"

In your opinion, what are the most common things bass players get wrong?

"It's important to realise that what you play has a knock-on effect on what everybody else plays, and some bass players can underestimate this. I think being a bass player is a big responsibility – sometimes you could change the guitar player in a band and it doesn't really change it too much, unless of course it's the guitar player's band and they're the focal point of the band, but if you change an aspect of the rhythm section – the bass or the drums – then for better or worse the music's going to feel really different, and it feels different to everyone – the musicians in the band and the audience. I think the listener can really detect subtle rhythmic inflections in things like note length and note placement. They might not be able to put it into words, but they'll instantly know that the music sounds different. Some bass players don't take that responsibility seriously enough.

"Another mistake is when bassists learn a tune, and think that it's about the bass exclusively and not considering how that will affect what everyone else plays – everyone can be guilty of this on occasion. I think it's important for bass players that when they learn a tune, even if they can't necessarily play what the guitar player plays, they should really know their part and how it sounds – the same goes for all the other instruments. This is what really helps in performing your bass-line and knowing where a fill is or isn't appropriate.

"Even though there are some amazing bass players, with ridiculous technical facility, who are an inspiration to me as a guitar player in terms of vocabulary and lines, the good ones know where to place the stuff. They know that there's a time and a place. If you can solo like crazy but you can't groove, then it's almost meaningless. I wonder where you would get the opportunity to display your soloing chops if you can't groove, because you wouldn't be that popular as a bass player to even get a gig in the first place.

"Another thing for me is sound. I've spent enough time at trade shows to hear bass players playing with this sound that has unbelievable amounts of bottom end and top end, and no mids, which is super-impressive when you're playing say a tap-slapped version of 'The Star-Spangled Banner' or whatever, by yourself, with a horde of admiring bass players – but on the bandstand that sound eats up every other frequency in the band and doesn't do the job. I like bass players who have a lot of body to the midrange, which is the complete opposite of what you hear on Youtube. If you're playing a solo piece, then great, but I've played with some bass players who have used that sound in a band setting, and it always makes me feel like there's something missing from the music.

"There are situations where it can work, like where the guitar player also takes on a different role, a bit like in The Who. Pete Townsend is like the anchor in that band, more than John Entwistle, so he's been able to take on more of the conventional lead guitar player's role. Billy Sheehan's another example – it's great and I love that stuff, but that band works as a unit because they have an unspoken agreement about their roles. Billy sounds great with Paul Gilbert, but Billy with Yngwie Malmsteen might be a different story – they'd both want to be David Beckham. It's not much of a football team with 11 Beckhams!"

Who are the bass players you would most like to play with, and why?

"Avishai Cohen is a modern player who, it strikes me, has the balance right. He's had experience as a sideman playing a supportive role, so he's able to place himself among other musicians, but when it's his turn to make a prominent feature of the bass-line then he'll move into that space with no problems. He can solo, he's creative, he's innovative and he has a great sound. It strikes me that he's someone, even though he plays music that we could broadly describe as jazz, who is very forward-thinking. I wouldn't consider myself to be a conventional jazz musician because I grew up listening to The Jimi Hendrix Experience and Van Halen, and then later went through Django Reinhardt and Biréli Lagrène, so I like musicians who are open to, but not restricted by a style. It's fine to play jazz, but you need to acknowledge that The Beatles exist! It's a matter of taste, though, and Avishai is great at that – it's never grandiose, or 'look at me', it just serves the music.

"Paul McCartney would be another one for me. There's the obvious reason that he's a Beatle and those bass-lines that he played are indelibly marked on my mind, but it's more than that. The funny thing is that even though I'm primarily a guitar player, I always imagine music from the bass-line up. If you want to sing the harmony to a tune, you can't sing a chord, so it's the bass line that most clearly implies the harmony, and that's usually what sticks in my mind first. I'm drawn to bass players who play very clear, distinct and defined bass-lines – that appeals to me. I think McCartney is just an incredible musician, and someone who is obviously innately musical to a very high degree. I've been listening to those first McCartney albums that he recorded after he left the Beatles, where he played every instrument. He

recorded it at home with just a microphone in the bathroom! At first he didn't even have a desk – just a mic into a tape machine, and he recorded each of the instruments one at a time. That meant that he must have had the musical imagination before he even recorded the first note: he could fully hear what it would sound like at the end, and I'm completely in awe of that.

"All the bass players I admire, guys like Laurence Cottle, they aren't just bass players, they've got that high level of musical imagination. Laurence might be playing at the bottom, holding down the bass in his big band, but he's heard all the parts, he's written them out and been able to conceptualise the whole thing from the start. He's completely in control of the whole picture – who could fail to be impressed by that?"

What are your favourite bass-lines and what is it you like about them?

"A favourite would be something like 'Mr Big' by Free: it's just so balanced musically. The bass-line is completely independent. In five or six notes Andy Fraser has managed to come up with a part that locks in with the drums, supports the harmony and is complementary to the guitar part, but is distinctly unique. Without that bass part you don't have that song.

"I'd also say pretty much anything by The Police, especially their early recordings. Sting is an immensely inventive bass player. Take 'Roxanne', for example. If you gave me the chords for that tune, and said 'Create a bass-line', I could sit there for the rest of time and I probably wouldn't have come up with that. His intonation is fantastic too, considering he's playing fretless on a lot of these things as well – how does he get it so accurate at the same time as singing?

"The other thing I like about these bass-lines is that if you took the rest of the parts away it would probably sound ludicrous! It's when it all the parts come together that it makes perfect sense and adds so much to the song, often being the most memorable thing: the 'hook'.

"Creating this sort of bass-line is about being creative, but also having the courage of your convictions. If you're creating a bass-line, it's about having the confidence that the line's going to work and sticking with it, rather than falling into the trap of never settling down on anything."

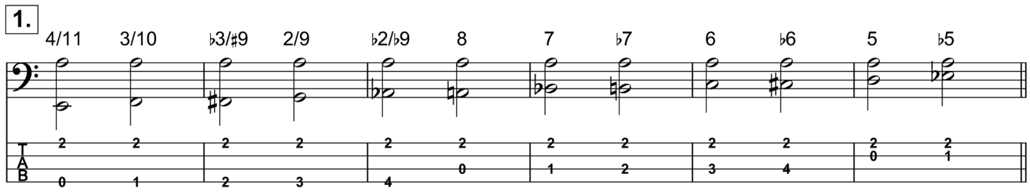
What sort of things do you think bass players should be practising?

"A good exercise for demonstrating the effect which a bass player can have on harmony is to take a chord, or even a single note, and change the bass-line that goes with it. This is a good way of experimenting and coming up with something new, but it's also good for really tuning into the responsibility you have as a bass player. You can have a huge impact on the way harmony is perceived – in fact, you have the deciding vote really more than any other instrument, so it's good to be aware of that power and use it wisely!"

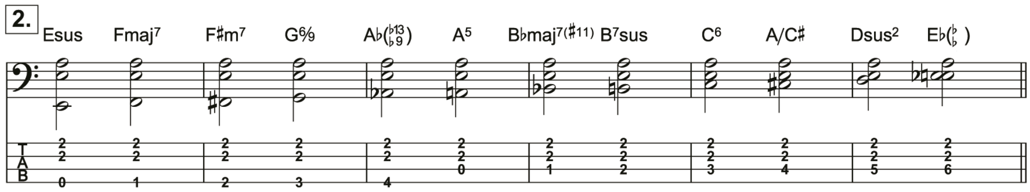
Exercises

These exercises will help tune you into the effect a change in bass note can have, and are also a good theory test. If you aren't that confident on theoretical stuff, then don't worry – you can still experiment with the different sounds and use your ear to guide you. The chord names I've used are sometimes approximate and simply one way of summarising the chord name, and in some cases there are alternatives.

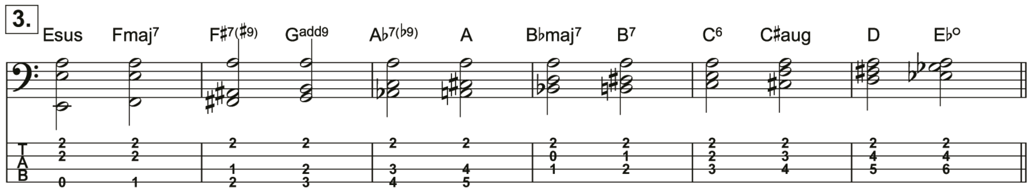
EXERCISE 1



EXERCISE 2



EXERCISE 3



EXERCISE 1

This is really just an interval exercise, but the other way round. The standard thing is to keep the root note the same and change the note on top, but here we're keeping a consistent 'A' throughout and changing the bass note chromatically. This will help you to hear intervals and tune into their respective qualities from a bass perspective.

EXERCISE 2

This holds two notes, A and E, constant and changes the bass note chromatically. Now that we have three notes at once we have a thicker sound. Some of the chords sound really plain and open, whereas others sound very thick and 'crunchy'! This is a great example of the power of the bass note.

EXERCISE 3

This keeps the top note 'A' consistent, changes the root note chromatically as before, but then also moves the middle note around a little to produce some different chord types to Exercise 2. This is to open up the harmonic possibilities – you can try your own variations, of course, and see what you can create. Have fun!

I hope you enjoyed this alternative viewpoint and have learnt something valuable. I'll be interviewing various different musicians over the next few issues – let me what you think, or if there's anything particular you would like to see! andrew.mckinney@techmusicschool.co.uk.

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FRANC O'SHEA

Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Brighton, Franc has worked with Steve Howe (Yes), Lisa Moorish, and Mike Lindup (Level 42). Described by Bass Guitar Magazine as 'the most musical of virtuoso bassists', Franc has also produced two solo albums. His most recent album, 'Alkimia', features Flamenco and Jazz legends Jorge Pardo and Rubem Dantas from Chick Corea's and Paco de Lucia's bands. Franc uses Jeff Chapman basses and Elites strings.
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FRANC O'SHEA
Bass Beyond

This month I will be analysing the bass solo from a tune called 'Bubbaloo', which appears on my first solo album, ***Esprit.***

The bass solo starts at approximately 2:40 on the CD: you can also hear it online at **www.myspace.com/francosheabass.** The solo lasts for three choruses of a standard 12-bar jazz blues sequence – 36 bars, in other words – and since it was played on fretless, I have indicated where I have used vibrato and slides. This shouldn't put you off playing it on a fretted bass, though. Although the piece is in the key of F, I haven't used a key signature as there are many accidentals used and 'open key' (no key signature, like C major) is employed for convenience.

There are obvious benefits to be gained by studying a solo such this, including both technical and theoretical aspects, and I hope that you won't be tempted to just copy my ideas, but will use them as a springboard for your own. The tempo is reasonably fast, at 260bpm, which is equivalent to 16th notes played at 130bpm. I suggest attempting it at a slower tempo and then building up speed gradually. The main point is to get an idea of how a solo like this works, and then use it as inspiration for your own.

The opening phrase of the solo starts out with a slide into the note A, which is the 3rd of F7. This is followed by the 5th of F7 (C) and you will see that the interval of a minor third between the A and C moves down in semitones until it reaches what becomes the 6th and octave of the Bb7 chord in the following bar. Chromatic patterns like this, which slip in and out of key, are quite common in jazz. They tend to work well when you start in key and then slip in and out – as many times as you want the pattern to continue – before finally ending up in key, so that there is resolution.

The line continues to descend, using F Mixolydian ideas, and ends with a double stop (b3rd and the octave of F), creating a minor blues sound on the F7 chord in bar 4. The Ab also anticipates the b7th of the Bb7 chord to come in the next bar. The shape of the second phrase suggests a response to the opening phrase and uses a minor blues idea, which anticipates the Bo7 chord that appears in the next bar. The line continues by using a 4th, #4th, 6th to 5th four-note pattern that repeats at the beginning of bar 7 and finishes with notes from a D Phrygian dominant scale in bar 8, suggesting an AÆ7 to D7b9 chord change for that bar. It is very common to use either Phrygian dominant or the altered scale on chord VI7 in jazz progressions, as I discussed in *BGM 58*.

Bar 9 sees another substitution, this time by using a Locrian natural 6 scale (the second mode of the harmonic minor scale) suggesting a GÆ7 chord. Next we come to the second chorus, and the line starts out using chromatic approach notes and an upper extension. Leading by a semitone from #4th to the 5th of F7 up to the 9th, the line comes back to the 5th and then uses another chromatic approach note C# (#5th of F7) to lead nicely to the third of the Bb7 in the next bar. Chromatic approach notes outside of the key/tonality that lead to, or approach, notes that are in the scale/chord by semitone, creating tension and subsequent release. They can work well with jazz, blues, funk, soul and rock. The phrase then continues with notes from a Bb7 Mixolydian mode.

The next phrase, which starts out in bar 15 (with a quaver lead in from the end of bar 14) has a typical bebop contour, as it is a mix of an arpeggio using upper extensions, scale notes and chromatic leading notes. It starts out with the 5th, 6th and b7th of the F Mixolydian mode before arpeggiating the upper extensions, ie the 9th (2nd), 11th (4th) and 13th (6th), and then leading to the 5th by using a chromatic approach note to move to it from the 13th (6th) and then continuing down the F Mixolydian until reaching its 3rd which would be the 6th of the C-7 chord. This 6th could be considered as a bb7th since the next two notes are from a Co7 chord, i.e. the b5 and the b3rd respectively.

There is then a chromatic leading note that leads to the root of the F7 chord and then to the #5th (b6th; see my article on using scales enharmonically in BGM 51) implying tension that wants to resolve up a semitone when the chord changes to Bb7 by ascending from a Db to the 3rd of Bb7, D natural. Some of you may be familiar with the inner phrase of the line in Bar 16 (Gb, Eb, E, F), which was often used by Charlie Parker and is known as a 'corkscrew' in bebop circles, a type of jazz mordent, and turns back on itself by finally landing on its target note. Then on the first beat of bar 17 a tritone double-stop is played, suggesting both F7 and Bb7 by playing on the fact that the b7 and 3 of the F7 become the 3 and b7 of the Bb7 when moved down a semitone. This is hinted

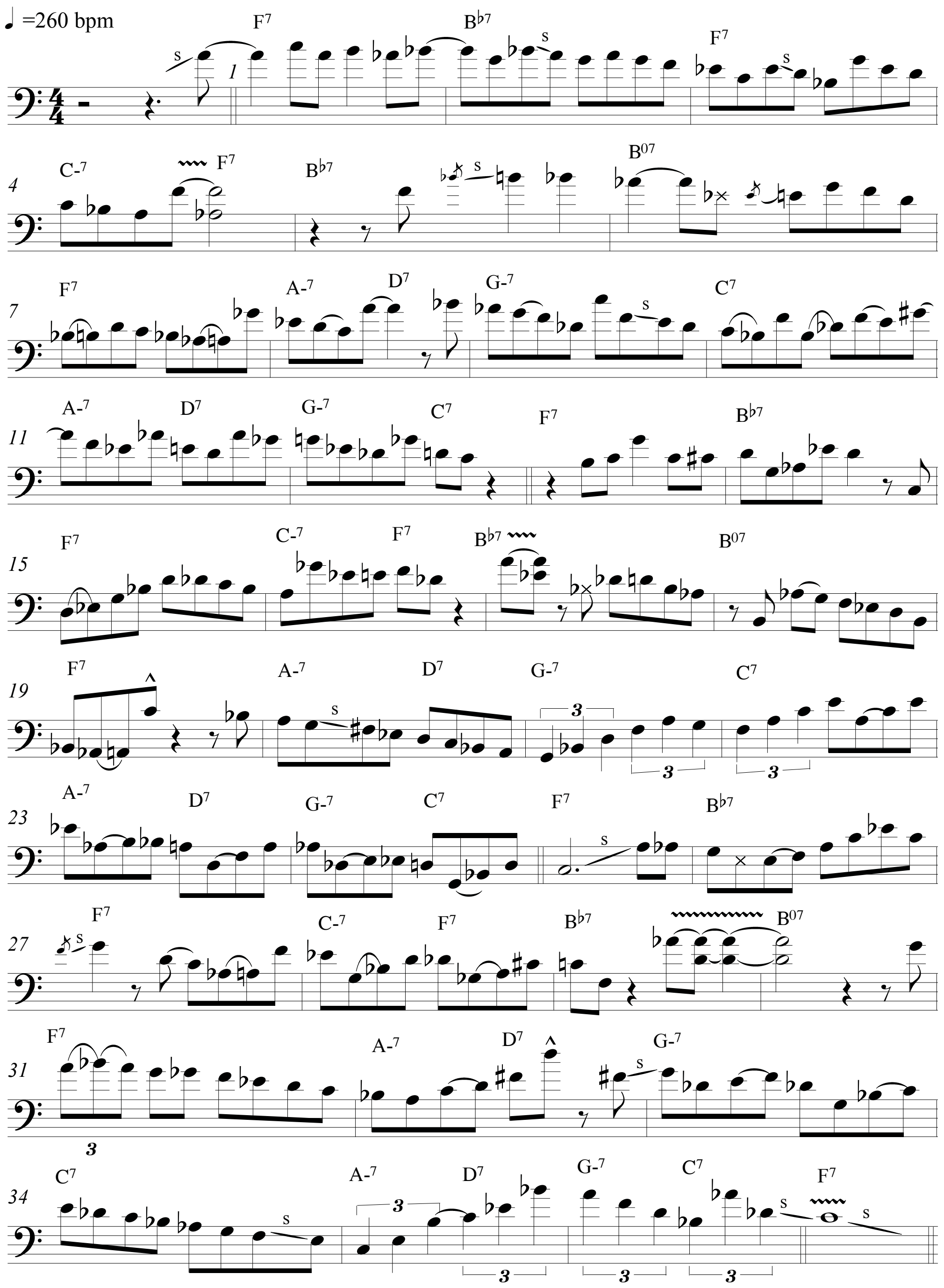
at by the vibrato used. The Bb7 is then fully established by the use of chord tones in the next phrase (3rd, root and b7th).

The phrase in bar 18 not only outlines the Bo7 chord, but as a descending scale run also suggests two modes; either a B altered bb7 (mode VII of C harmonic minor) or a Cb (B) Lydian #2 #5 (mode bVI of Eb harmonic major). It then uses a chromatic approach note to resolve into the 3rd of F7 before finally jumping a minor 10th to land on the 5th of F (ie C) an octave higher. Next comes a long phrase that starts at the end of bar 19 (last quaver) and continues until beat 1 of the next chorus in bar 25. The phrase starts out by using an AÆ7 to substitute for the A-7 and suggests the scale of A Locrian natural 6 (mode II of G harmonic minor) before moving to the D7 where a D Phrygian dominant scale is suggested (mode V of G harmonic minor).

In bar 21 the rhythm switches from quavers to crotchet triplets and outlines a G-9 chord before using extensions and chord tones for the C7 in the next bar. Bar 19 onwards sees a combination of minor arpeggios and inverted 'corkscrews' before finally resolving at the 5th of F7 on bar 1 of the next chorus. It then continues by using extensions of the Bb7 chord before sliding up to the 9th of the next F7.

Later in bar 27 a classic jazz/blues-type line then leads into a chromatically descending minor arpeggio pattern (suggesting a b9 and a #5 on the F7 chord) before finally landing on the 5th of Bb7 in bar 29. Later in bar 29, the 3rd and b7th of the Bb7 are outlined and carried over into bar 30 where they become the b3 and bb7 of the Bo7 chord (both Bb7 and Bo7 share the notes D, F and Ab). Next comes a classic bebop line similar to 'Donna Lee', using both scale notes and a chromatic link, and once again suggesting a D Phrygian dominant on the D7 chord at the end of the phrase.

Example



Finally, there's a long phrase to finish the solo off, stretching from the end of bar 32 right up to the final descending slide in bar 37 where the drum solo starts. It starts out by outlining a GÆ7 over the G-7 chord using a Locrian natural 6 (same as Dorian b2 b5) and using a different mode of the same scale, C Phrygian dominant, for the C7 chord. Both of these scales belong to F harmonic minor, creating a type of parallel modulation for the key (see BGM 76 for more on parallel modulation). Then as the phrase continues, the rhythm changes to crotchet triplets in bar 35 outlining the A-7 chord with its b3, 5th and then the extension of a 9th before highlighting the b7, b9 and #5 (b13) of the D7 chord. This leads to bar 36 where the 9th, b7th and 5th of the G-7 chord are played, which is followed by the b7, #5 and b9 being highlighted on the C7 chord just as they were on the previous D7 chord.

By analysing a solo like this, you will gain an insight into how all the theory material I have covered in my previous columns can actually be put into practice, to elevate it from being merely dry information to being usable as a springboard for creativity, inspired ideas and ultimately great music.

KEV SANDERS

Kev Sanders is a freelance electric and double bassist who has gigged and recorded with artists as diverse as singer Clare Teal and legendary saxophonist Pete King, to the Levellers and multi award-winning Korean classical pianist Ingrid Wu. As well as numerous BBC radio and television sessions, He's played over 4000 live gigs, appearing everywhere from Brussels to Broadway and as head of Bass Studies for AMS he developed and wrote both the full time Btec and Degree courses.
www.kevsanders.com

I WANT TO PLAY LIKE... JOHN ENTWISTLE

The late, great Ox's unique technique investigated

JOHN ENTWISTLE'S GEAR

Entwistle was a real bass guitar enthusiast, and built up a collection of over 200 instruments. He started out playing a Fender Precision, a little later switching to a Gibson EB2. Throughout his career he constantly experimented with dozens of different instruments, but often returned to his Fender. Two of the most iconic Entwistle basses are the Alembic 'Spyder' basses and latterly, the 'Buzzard' basses made first by Modulus and Warwick and later developed by Rob Green and Status. Amp-wise, John Entwistle was an early user of Marshall stacks; indeed, he was key to the 100-watt head's design and development. Later he used Sound City and Hiwatt amp rigs. At the beginning of his career he struggled to find bass strings that suited his aggressive style, and famously went to Rotosound to see if they could help. It's become part of rock folklore that Entwistle was given a free lifetime's supply of Swingbass strings, which he and James Howe developed together.

John Entwistle was the perfect bassist for The Who; his distinct style and tone made him the rock bass standard bearer of the 60s and 70s. His sound was developed as much from the necessity to be heard as anything else. Early on, The Who were essentially a power trio with a frontman, which meant that despite Pete Townshend's rhythmic, driving guitar style, the bass needed to provide a loud and full foundation for the rest of the band. This was particularly important given the busy and florid style of Keith Moon's drumming. The Ox, as Entwistle was known, died a decade ago in a truly rock'n'roll manner, and his legacy is enormous. Quite simply, The Who would never have been the mega-band they were without him. For bassists, the most fascinating aspect of Entwistle's playing is his trademark right-hand technique: he hammered the strings in various ways with his fingers, using lots of root-plus-five power chords, and two- and three-string strumming. Above all, he played loud…very, very loud.

ESSENTIAL ENTWISTLE TRACKS

'My Generation'
This single, released in 1965, appears on the album of the same name, although the version from Live At Leeds is one of the greatest live recordings ever. It contains the defining Thunderfingers solo.

'My Wife'
Not only did the Ox write this song, he also sang lead vocals, played bass and piano and played and arranged the horn parts.

'Won't Get Fooled Again'
A busy but rhythmic improvised bass line, and the perfect foil for Townshend's solid guitar.

'The Real Me'
Turn up loud and listen to that overdriven bass tone!

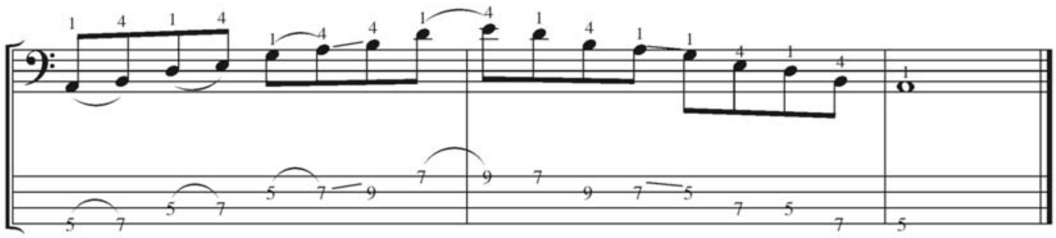
'Pinball Wizard'
The massive hit from the musical and album, Tommy.

John Entwistle's Style

Entwistle's style is best analysed by looking at his left-hand and right-hand techniques separately. First, the easy bit; his left hand. The Ox used a fairly basic 'thumb over the top of the neck' left hand style. Most of his passages were based around minor pentatonics, and played in a way that used, for the most part, only his first and fourth fingers.

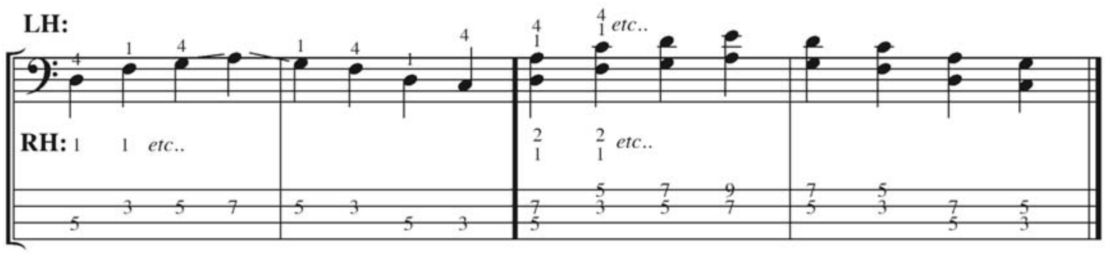
Exercise 1

Try these exercises using the written fingering and position. It ain't pretty, but it's certainly effective!



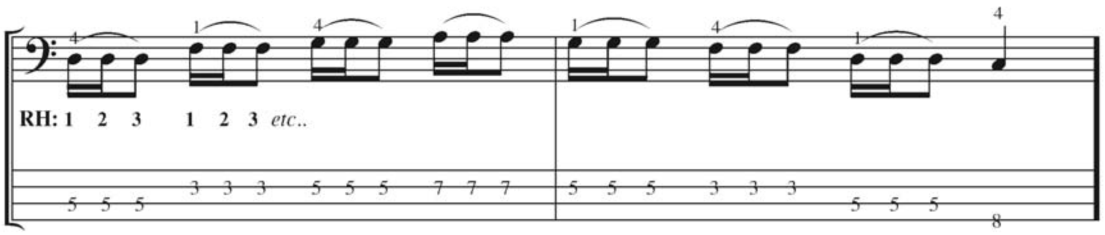
So far, so normal. But it's Entwistle's right-hand technique that really stands out and with it, he pioneered many of the bass techniques we see so often today, including tapping notes and chords, strumming and one of the first ever rock bass solos. Rather than tapping in the more 'traditional' sense of say, Victor Wooten, Entwistle used a much harder, more aggressive technique that replaced traditional plucking for some of his solo passages – in this sense it was more like slapping than tapping. He would hammer down hard on the strings at the end of the fretboard with one, two or three fingers to create his trademark tone while fretting the notes with his left hand in the normal manner. Let's focus on a few of his favourite methods.

Exercise 2



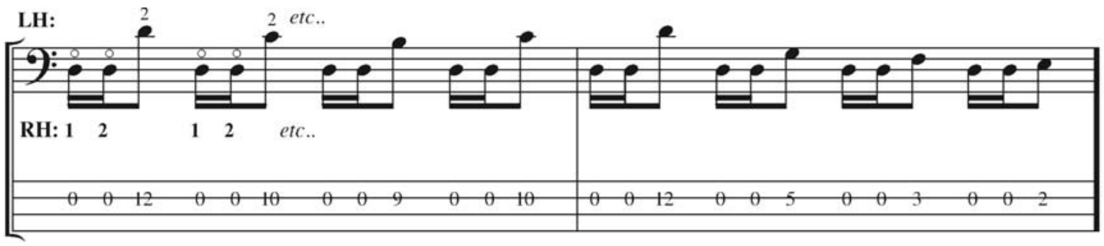
Here, we hammer with one finger on one string and root five with first and second fingers. Rest the palm of your right hand against the E string and the body of the bass as an anchor, then, arching your whole hand, use the tip of your first and second fingers to strike the A, D and G strings hard.

Exercise 3



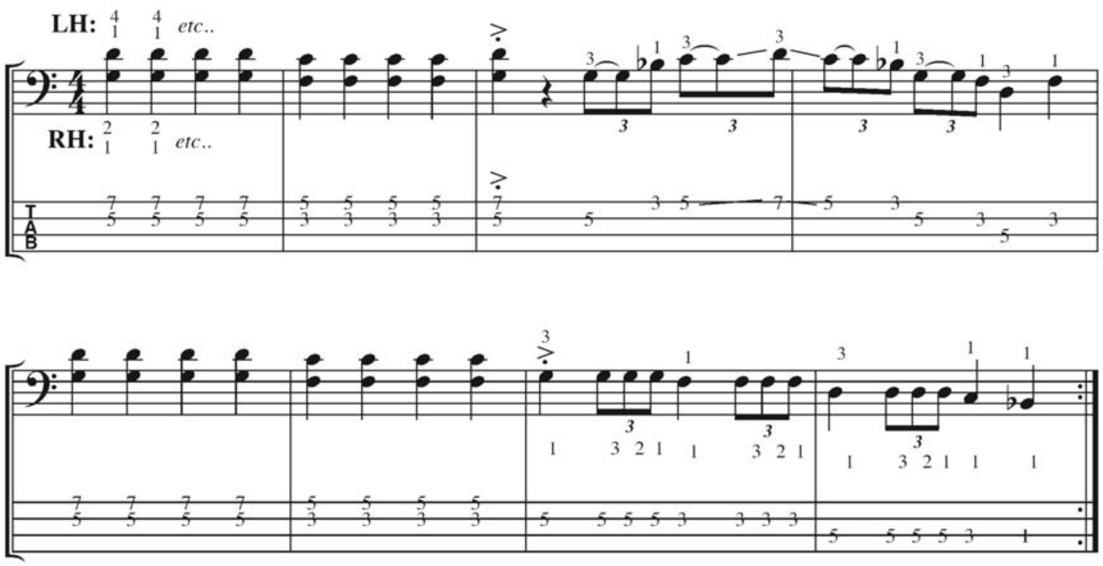
Hammering with two and three fingers on one string to produce rapid three-note groups, rather like drumming your fingers on a tabletop – 3, 2, 1; 3, 2, 1 and so on.

Exercise 4



Try to hammer on with your left-hand fingers to produce the third note of a group. Hammer the first two notes of the group (open D) with the right hand as before, but hammer down on the fretted note with the second finger to produce the third.

Exercise 5



Now put some of these techniques together and try this eight-bar bass solo in the style of 'My Generation'. Make sure you have your treble, mids and volume turned way up, and add a little overdrive for that authentic Thunderfingers tone!

DAVE MARKS

Dave Marks is a busy freelance bassist living and working out of London. His playing and recording credits span a wide range of bands and artists, including Hurts, Nik Kershaw, Wishbone Ash, Julian Perretta, Larry Carlton, Albert Lee, Carl Palmer and many others.

At the minute his time is spread between pounding out 8th-note rock with the Rick Parfitt Jnr band, touring with his 'RhythmMatters' masterclasses and depping internationally with Hurts and for *Thriller Live* on the West End.

Aside from his full playing, teaching and masterclass schedule, Dave maintains a heavy web presence, between his own site, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter pages.

For backing tracks to use with this lesson, visit **www.davebasslessons.com**

DAVE MARKS: MELODIC BASS PLAYING

MODES

In this new series of columns, I've decided to try and bring some clarity to one of the most commonly misunderstood aspects of melodic playing – the use of modes.

Although the modes originated in ancient Greek (and to a lesser degree, Jewish) music, the most common modern application for them is in jazz. As a result, a lot of people assume that they are therefore complex or difficult to use and understand. Through this series, I'm going to explain how to use modes in the simplest and most functional language I can.

The modes actually crop up in all kinds of music, but in most cases, people don't analyse the harmony of pop songs and so their use goes undetected.

To understand modes, we must first understand what a scale is: a scale is simply a series of pitches, built from a 'tonic' note. The tonic note functions as 'home' to the harmony. It is often referred to as the 'key note' or 'key centre'.

Harmony in music creates drama through tension and resolution – the idea that we establish a home sound, that we move away from it and then resolve back. All of the emotional twists and turns in music are made by finding clever ways to lead your ear away from home and then find a way back.

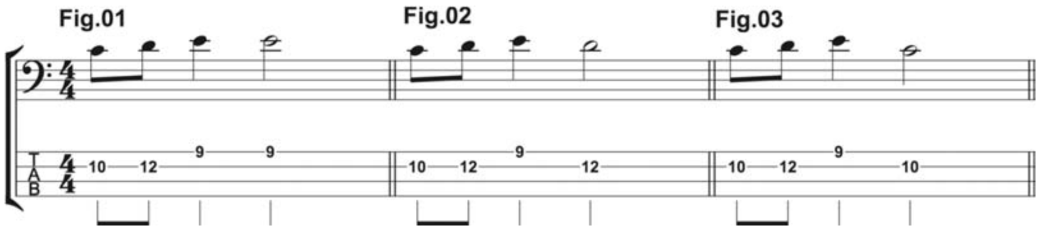
When you listen to banal pop music, it sounds dry and tedious because it uses the same devices over and over to get emotional responses. (Pop ballads moving up a tone for the last chorus… didn't see that one coming!)

Creating Resolutions

People often refer to 'cadences' when talking about musical resolution: a cadence is simply the conclusion of a phrase or idea.

Thus, if we are in the key of C, the note 'C' is our tonic, and movement from any note back to C represents the point of strongest resolution. If I were to play a short melody over a C major chord and end it three different ways, you should be able to hear the difference in the degree of resolution.

Fig. 01

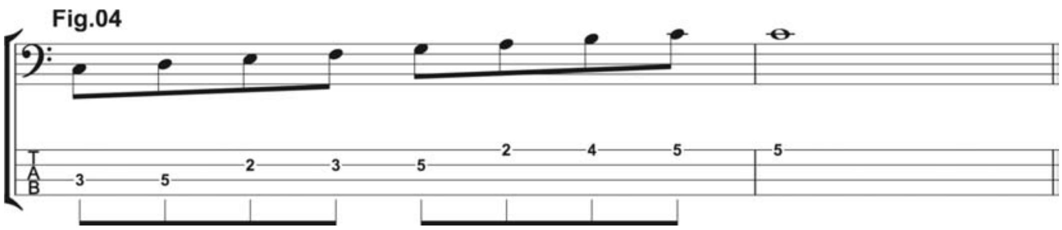


In Fig. 01, the melody ascends C – D – E and then hangs there. Because the note that our phrase finishes on is the major third in the chord, it doesn't sound dissonant or tense, but it isn't the strongest resolution we could create.

In Fig. 02, the melody ascends three notes then drops back to the second. This creates an unresolved quality: it feels as though the melody has left you hanging – it definitely doesn't feel like this is where we should stop.

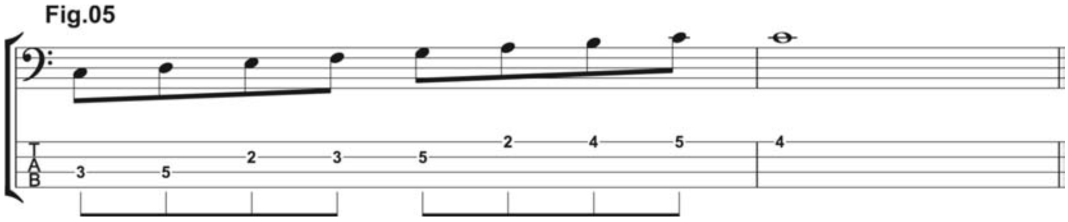
In Fig. 03, the melody moves up three notes and then drops back to our tonic. You can hear how this return to the C note feels very resolved, settled and final. You could finish a phrase, line or entire song with this idea and it would sound very satisfying.

Fig. 04



To illustrate this idea further, try playing an entire C major scale and finish with the top note, C **(Fig. 04).**

Fig. 05



Now compare this with playing the scale but finishing on the seventh note, B. **(Fig. 05)**

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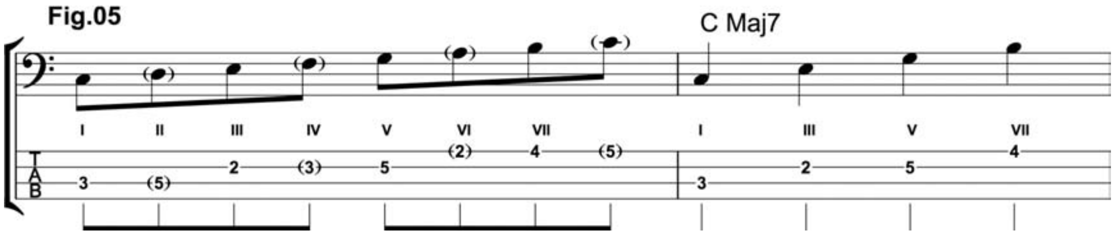
You can feel that the B note really wants to move up a semitone – there's a strong pull toward the C. It may help to think about the amount of 'gravity' that a note has – the pull towards your tonic is stronger than any of the other notes.

Scales And Chords - Every scale is built with a four-note chord inside it. If you ascend the scale, playing a note and then skipping one, you are left with the first, third, fifth and seventh notes of the scale. We refer to scale degrees using Roman numerals, so you have I, III, V and VII.

Fig. 05 C Major Scale

For the C major scale, we have the notes C, E, G and B, which give us a C major triad with a major 7th note on top. This chord is called C major7 (Fig. 05).



In order to understand how the modes work, the first and most basic idea that you must grasp is that the scale of C major fits over a C major 7 chord, because the notes of that chord are found on the I, III, V and VII degrees of that scale. The first mode that we need to learn about is the Ionian mode, and is more commonly referred to as… the major scale. Congratulations! You've just learned your first mode.

So why would we use the Ionian mode when playing a song? Put most simply, each chord in a progression has a unique function and if you want to play melodically around each chord, you cannot simply use a pattern. You need to know where the chord occurs within the key and make choices based on that position.

Fig. 07 Here's a really simple example:

This progression uses chords I, IV and V. In the key of C, those are C major, F major and G major. All three are major chords, so they all contain a root, major 3rd and perfect 5th and if I play melodically using root, 3rd, 5th on each chord, it works perfectly.

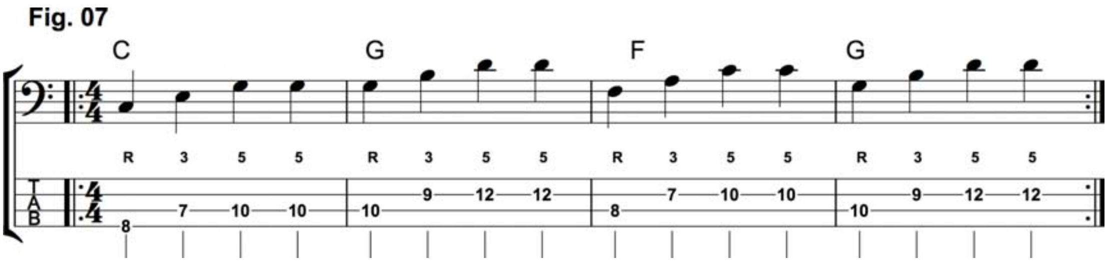
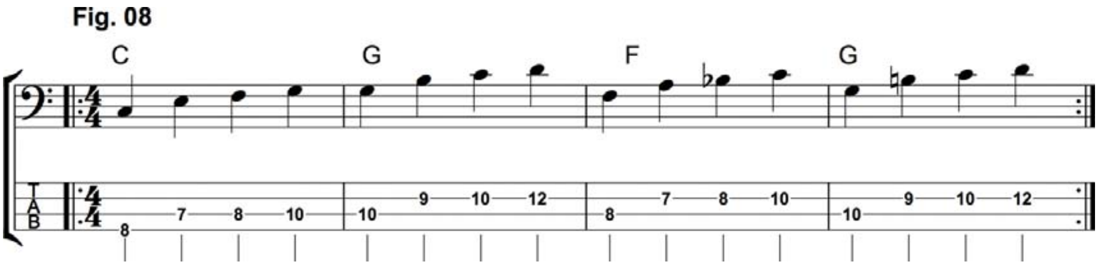


Fig. 08



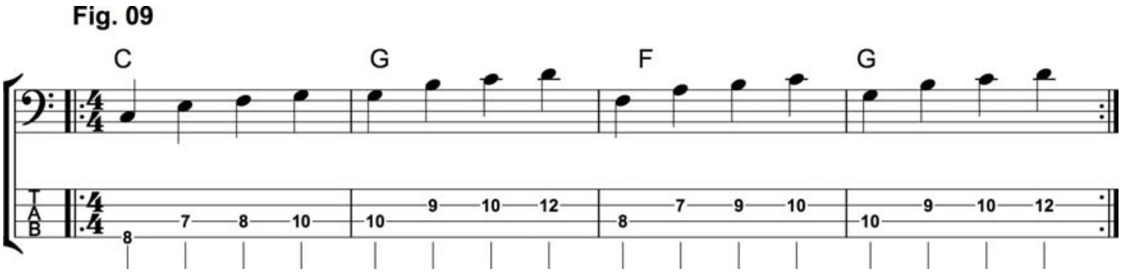
In Fig. 08, I'm adding in the 4th to create a link between the 3rd and 5th of each chord… but I've encountered a problem. By using a strict root, 3rd, 4th, 5th pattern, my C and G chords sound fine, but there's something wrong on the F chord. (If you're a tab reader, have a quick look at the score in bar three.)

In bar three, the third note has a 'flat' sign next to the B. The note Bb does not belong in the key of C major and so when you play that line, you're using a shape or fingering pattern that is easy on muscle memory, but features inappropriate musical information.

If I think about the C major scale / mode of C Ionian, I know that it does not contain any sharps or flats. Instead of playing that line with a Bb, I adjust the fingering to play with a B natural.

Fig. 09

Now each individual chord has a nice melodic line, and more importantly, the entire progression is underpinned by a fluid, melodic part that links each of the chords together, grounding them in the key of C major.



Next month, we'll look at the second mode of the major scale, the Dorian mode. Until then, watch out for uses of the major scale / Ionian mode in music that you play – I guarantee you'll find it!

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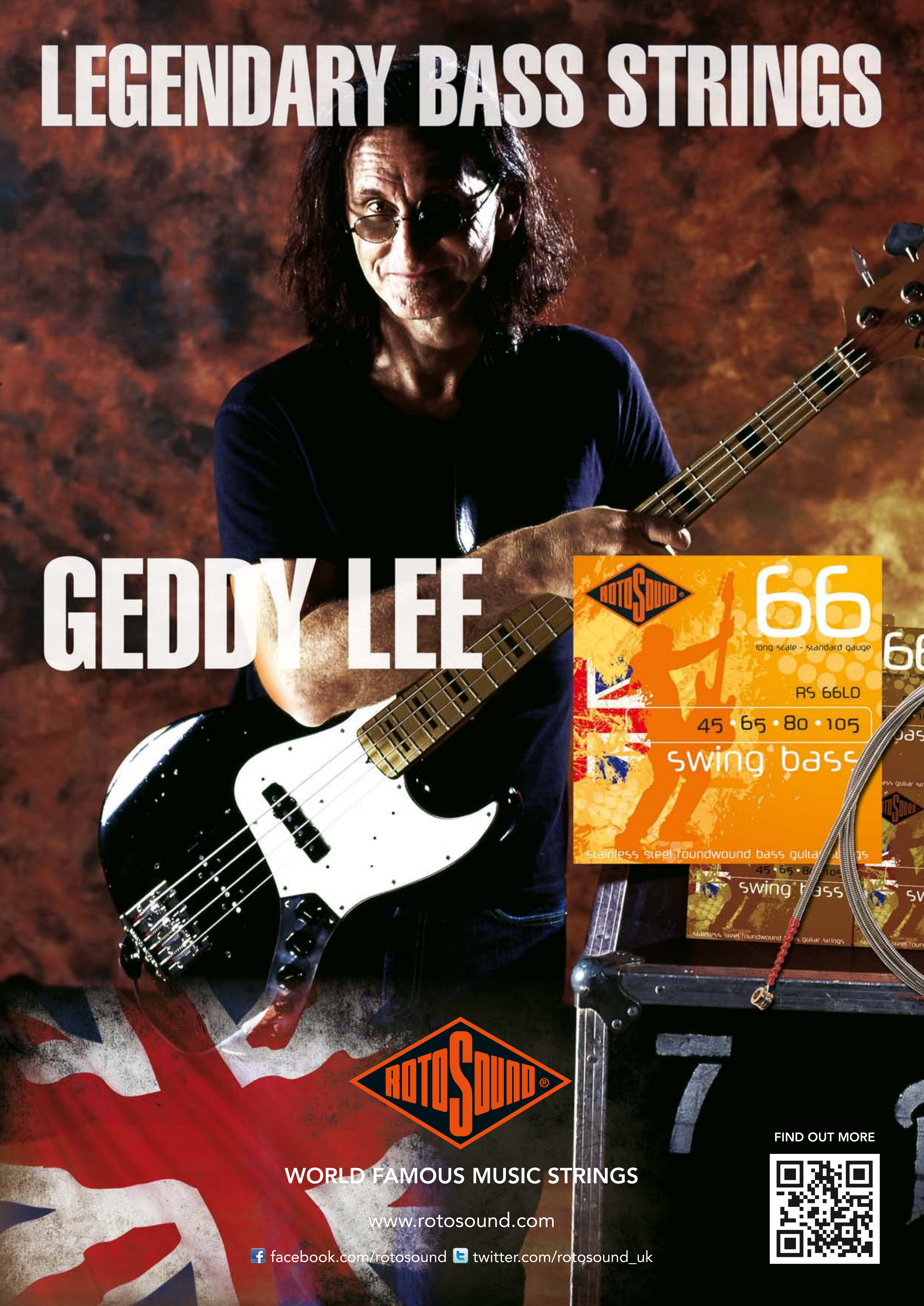
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